THE ROVER BOYS ON SNOWSHOE ISLAND

THE SECOND ROVER BOYS SERIES

FOR YOUNG AMERICANS

By ARTHUR M. WINFIELD

Raymond Eddis

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JACK AND THE TWINS RESCUE THE INJURED MAN.

The Rover Boys on Snowshoe Island. *Frontispiece—Page* 46

THE ROVER BOYS ON SNOWSHOE ISLAND

OR

THE OLD LUMBERMAN'S TREASURE BOX

BY

ARTHUR M. WINFIELD

(Edward Stratemeyer)

AUTHOR OF "THE ROVER BOYS AT SCHOOL," "THE ROVER BOYS ON THE OCEAN," "THE PUTNAM HALL SERIES," ETC.

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BOOKS BY ARTHUR M. WINFIELD
(Edward Stratemeyer)

THE FIRST ROVER BOYS SERIES

THE ROVER BOYS AT SCHOOL
THE ROVER BOYS ON THE OCEAN
THE ROVER BOYS IN THE JUNGLE
THE ROVER BOYS OUT WEST
THE ROVER BOYS ON THE GREAT LAKES
THE ROVER BOYS IN THE MOUNTAINS
THE ROVER BOYS IN CAMP
THE ROVER BOYS ON LAND AND SEA
THE ROVER BOYS ON THE RIVER
THE ROVER BOYS ON THE PLAINS
THE ROVER BOYS IN SOUTHERN WATERS
THE ROVER BOYS ON THE FARM
THE ROVER BOYS ON TREASURE ISLE
THE ROVER BOYS AT COLLEGE
THE ROVER BOYS DOWN EAST
THE ROVER BOYS IN THE AIR
THE ROVER BOYS IN NEW YORK
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THE SECOND ROVER BOYS SERIES

THE ROVER BOYS AT COLBY HALL
THE ROVER BOYS ON SNOWSHOE ISLAND

THE PUTNAM HALL SERIES

THE PUTNAM HALL CADETS
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THE PUTNAM HALL CHAMPIONS
THE PUTNAM HALL REBELLION
THE PUTNAM HALL ENCAMPMENT
THE PUTNAM HALL MYSTERY

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EDWARD STRATEMEYER

The Rover Boys on Snowshoe Island

INTRODUCTION

My Dear Boys: This book is a complete story in itself, but forms the second volume in a line issued under the general title, "The Second Rover Boys Series for Young Americans."

As mentioned in several volumes of the first series, this line was started a number of years ago with the publication of "The Rover Boys at School," "On the Ocean," and "In the Jungle." In those volumes my young readers were introduced to Dick, Tom and Sam Rover.

The volumes of the first series related the adventures of the three Rover boys while attending Putnam Hall Military Academy, Brill College, and while on numerous outings.

These Rover boys were, of course, growing steadily older. They met three young ladies in whom they became intensely interested, and, after becoming established in business, three happy marriages followed. Presently Dick Rover was blessed with a son and a daughter, as was also his brother Sam, while the fun-loving Tom be-

came the proud father of twin boys, who were as full of spirit as their parent had ever been. At first the boys were kept at home, but then it was thought best to send them to a boarding school.

At Colby Hall the young Rovers made a host of friends, and also some enemies. They had to work hard over their studies, but they had a thoroughly good time.

In the present volume the boys are still at Colby Hall, but presently the scene is shifted to Snowshoe Island, where the lads go for a short hunting season. How they ran into a most unusual mystery and helped an old lumberman to establish his claim to the island, I will leave the pages which follow to relate.

In conclusion I wish to thank my numerous readers for the many kind things they have said about these Rover Boys books, and especially about the initial volume in the second series. I trust that all my readers will like Jack, Andy and Randy, and Fred as much as they did Dick, Tom, and Sam Rover.

Affectionately and sincerely yours,

EDWARD STRATEMEYER.

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THE ROVER BOYS ON SNOWSHOE ISLAND

CHAPTER I

FUN ON THE ICE

"EVERYBODY ready?"

"Sure! Been ready half an hour."

"Wait a minute, Frank, till I tighten my skate strap," cried Fred Rover, as he bent down to adjust the loosened bit of leather.

"Hurry up, Fred, we don't want to stand here all day," sang out his Cousin Andy gaily.

"That's it! I want to win this race," broke in Randy Rover, Andy's twin brother.

"Now remember, the race is to be to the old white pine and back," announced the starter. "Every contestant has got to touch the tree before he starts to come back; otherwise he'll be counted out."

"You ought to have a pistol to start us with," came from Jack Rover.

"I guess my old locomotive whistle will do for that," answered Frank Newberry. He paused to look at the line of skaters. "Now then, everybody on the job!" and a loud whistle rent the air.

Instantly there was a scurry of skates, and off the line started across Clearwater Lake to where a blasted pine tree reared its naked trunk against the skyline.

It was a Saturday afternoon in early winter, and the cadets of Colby Hall Military Academy were out in force to enjoy themselves on the smooth ice of the lake, near which the school was located. The cadets had been amusing themselves in various ways, playing tag and hockey, and in "snapping the whip," as it is called, when Gif Garrison, at the head of the athletic association, had suggested a race.

"We might as well find out who is the best skater in the school," Gif had said.

"Right you are," had come from his particular chum, Spouter Powell. "Let us get up a race by all means."

With so many cadets who could skate well, it was an easy matter to arrange for the contest. To make the matter more interesting, one of the Hall professors, Mr. Brice, said he would give some prizes to the pupils coming in first, second and third.

"I'll give a fine book of adventures to the first cadet, and also books to the others," Mr. Brice announced. He was still a young man, and in hearty sympathy with everything in the way of outdoor sports.

Among those to enter the contest were Jack Rover and his three cousins, Fred, Andy and Randy. All were provided with hockey skates, and each felt confident of making a good record for himself. Yet they all knew that the school boasted of some fine skaters, one lad in particular, Dan Soppinger, having won several contests on the ice in years gone by.

"We've got our work cut out for us!" cried Fred Rover, as he skated beside Jack.

"Save your wind, Fred," answered his cousin briefly.

"Believe me, this is going to be some race!" came from Randy, who was on the other side of Jack, with his twin brother next to him.

"I don't care who wins so long as I'm not last," responded his twin merrily.

Over twenty cadets had started in the contest, and soon the line, which had been fairly even for a few seconds after the whistle had sounded, began to take on a straggly appearance, as some skaters forged ahead and others fell behind.

"Don't give up! Everybody keep in the race

until the finish!" cried Professor Brice encouragingly. "Remember, a race isn't over until the end is reached."

Thus encouraged, those who were in the rear did their best to overtake those ahead. But gradually the skaters divided into three groups; eight in the lead, six but a short distance behind them, and the others several yards further to the rear.

In the front group were Jack and his cousin Randy, while Fred and Andy were less than ten feet behind.

The distance across Clearwater Lake was about half a mile, but the blasted pine tree was located some distance down the shore, so that the race would be close to a mile and a half in length.

Spouter Powell was in the lead when the first group of skaters came up to the pine tree. Dan Soppinger was close behind him, with Jack and Randy following. Behind Randy came Walt Baxter, another cadet who skated remarkably well. The others of the first group were gradually dropping back to the second contingent. Spouter Powell touched the tree with his finger tips, and was followed almost immediately by Dan Soppinger. As they turned to go back to the starting point, they were followed by Jack and Randy.

"Hi, you fellows! what do you mean by skat-

ing so quick?" piped out Andy Rover gaily.

"We'll leave the tree to you, Andy!" shouted his twin.

"I don't think we'll win, but, anyway, we won't be last," came from Fred, as he and Andy touched the tree.

"Well, we can't have everything in this world," was the philosophic reply from the other Rover boy.

It could be seen that the race had now narrowed down to the five who were in the lead. Of these, Spouter Powell and Dan Soppinger were less than two feet apart, while only a yard to the rear came Jack, Randy and Walt Baxter.

"Go it, Randy!" sang out Andy, as he dropped still further behind. "Go it! I know you can win!"

"Keep it up, Jack!" yelled Fred, who, being the smallest of the four Rovers, found it impossible to keep up the pace. "Don't let Spouter and Dan hold you back!"

There were numerous cries of encouragement for all of the skaters as they swept forward toward the starting point. Here a line had been drawn on the ice, and the cadets stood at either end, some with their watches in their hands to time the winners.

"I'll bet Dan Soppinger wins!" cried one of

the cadets. "He's the best skater on the lake."

"Well, Spouter Powell is a good skater, too," returned another.

"Huh! what's the matter with the Rover boys?" burst out a third cadet, round-faced and remarkably fat—so fat, in fact, that he had not dreamed of participating in the contest.

"I don't know much about how they can skate," was the reply. "They weren't here last winter, you remember."

"Yes, I know that," answered Fatty Hendry. "Here they come!"

By this time the skaters were half way on the return from the blasted pine. Spouter Powell and Dan Soppinger were still in the lead, but Walt Baxter was crawling up steadily, while Jack and Randy were close behind.

"Say, this is going to be a neck-and-neck race!" cried one of the cadets, Ned Lowe by name. He had wanted to race himself, but knew that his skates were too dull for that purpose.

"Stand back! Give them plenty of room!" exclaimed Professor Brice, and he took measures to clear the cadets away from the finishing line.

Quite a crowd had assembled to witness the contest, not only cadets, but also some folks from the neighboring town of Haven Point, and also a number of young ladies from Clearwater

Hall, a seminary located some distance away.

The skaters had still a distance of several hundred yards to cover when it was seen that Spouter Powell was gradually falling behind. Then Jack Rover forged forward, followed by his Cousin Randy.

"The Rovers are crawling up!"

"See, Jack Rover and his Cousin Randy and Dan Soppinger and Walt Baxter are all in a line!"

"This certainly is one close race!"

The excitement increased as the racers drew closer to the finishing line. Walt Baxter was panting painfully, showing that he had used up almost every ounce of his strength.

"Oh, dear! I do hope the Rovers come in ahead," whispered one girl skater to another. She was a tall girl, remarkably good looking and dressed in a suit of brown, with furs.

"So do I hope the Rover boys win, Ruth," answered her girl companion, "now that my Cousin Dick has fallen behind."

"It's too bad, May, that your Cousin Dick couldn't have kept up," answered Ruth Stevenson.

Closer and closer to the finishing line crept the four leading skaters, Jack and Randy in the middle, with Dan Soppinger on their left and Walt

Baxter on their right. Now Spouter Powell had fallen back to the second group of racers.

"Here they come!"

"It's Dan Soppinger's race!"

"Not much! Here comes Walt Baxter! Gee, see him strike out!"

"It's the Rovers who are coming to the front!" exclaimed Ned Lowe.

"I knew they couldn't hold those Rover boys back," was Frank Newberry's comment. "Now then, boys, for a final dash!" he shouted.

All four of the leading contestants were bending forward and striking out as powerfully as possible, their arms swinging from side to side like pendulums and their skates ringing clearly on the smooth ice.

For an instant all were in a line, then, by a tremendous effort, Walter Baxter forged a foot ahead. But almost instantly Dan Soppinger overtook the other cadet. An instant later Randy Rover came up beside the others, followed by his Cousin Jack.

The finishing line was now less than fifty yards away, and the crowd was yelling all sorts of words of encouragement and cheering wildly, even the girls and older folks present being much excited. Then, of a sudden, an exclamation of wonder rent the air.

"Look at that, will you? Did you ever see such striking out in your life?"

"He's coming forward like a cannon ball!"

These exclamations had been brought forth by the sudden change of tactics on the part of Jack Rover. Coming back from the blasted pine he had managed to hang close to his opponents, but without using up all his reserve force. Now he let out "for all he was worth," as he afterwards declared, and, with strokes that could hardly be seen for their rapidity, he forged in front of Soppinger and Baxter.

"It's Jack Rover's race!"

"Look! Look! Here comes his Cousin Randy!" yelled Ned Lowe.

"No use in talking—you can't hold those Rover boys back," was Fatty Hendry's comment.

What the cadets had said was true. Following the extraordinary spurt made by Jack, Randy let himself out, and in a twinkling had passed Baxter. Then he found himself neck-and-neck with Dan Soppinger, who was struggling with might and main to catch up to Jack, just two feet ahead.

"Make room for the winners!"

"Jack Rover wins the race!"

"Yes, and Randy Rover is second!"

"Who takes third place?"

"Soppinger, I guess."

"No, I think Walt Baxter was a little ahead of him."

"Nonsense! It was a tie between them."

"Three cheers for the Rover boys!" shouted Ned Lowe, and many cadets joined in the cheering.

Jack and Randy were quickly surrounded by many of their chums and congratulated on their success.

"It was a tie race between Soppinger and Baxter," announced Professor Brice. "And that being so, I will give each of them a third prize," and with this those two contestants had to be contented.

"You made that race in record time, Jack," announced Gif Garrison. "It is better time by twelve seconds than was ever made before on this lake."

"Well, where do I come in?" demanded Randy.

"You broke the record by ten seconds," was the reply. "And believe me, that's some stunt!"

"I guess I was beaten fairly," announced Dan Soppinger, a little ruefully; "so there is no use of complaining."

"Oh, it was a fair and square race sure enough," answered Walt Baxter. "All the same, if my skates had been just a little sharper I think

I might have won," he added a little wistfully.

"Well, I am glad the honors stay in our family anyhow," announced Fred, as he skated up, followed by Andy.

"And first and second prizes, too!" cried his cousin. "That ought to be enough to hold the other fellows for awhile."

Jack and Randy were both panting from their exertions, but their faces showed their satisfaction, and especially did Jack look his pleasure when he happened to glance beyond the crowd of cadets and saw Ruth Stevenson waving her hand toward him. Beside Ruth was May Powell, who waved gaily to all of the Rovers.

"Fine race, boys! Fine race!" was Fatty Hendry's comment. "Just the same, none of you would have been in it for a minute if I had entered," and at this joke there was a general laugh.

"Say, Fatty, you should have gone into it just to lose flesh," was Andy's dry comment. "If you tried real hard, you might lose a pound a mile," and at this there was another laugh.

The crowd began to gather around Jack and Randy and the others who had won the race, and many wanted to shake hands with the oldest Rover boy. Even some of the town folks skated up, and they were followed by some of the girls from Clearwater Hall.

"I say, boys, this may not be safe!" cried Professor Brice suddenly, when the crowd on the ice had become unusually thick. "This ice isn't as strong as it might be."

"Yes, and with Fatty in the crowd——" began Andy Rover. Then, of a sudden, he stopped short because an ominous crack was heard, followed by several other cracks.

"The ice is breaking!"

"Skate away, everybody, or we'll go down!"

Instantly there was a commotion, and all of the skaters tried to break away from the spot where the crowd had congregated. The confusion was tremendous, and in the mix-up six or eight persons, including Ruth Stevenson and May Powell, were thrown down. Then came another crack, and it looked as if in another instant the ice would give way completely and precipitate the whole crowd into the cold waters of the lake.

CHAPTER II

SOMETHING ABOUT THE ROVER BOYS

It was a time of extreme peril, and it is doubtful if any one realized that more than did Jack Rover. He, too, had been thrown down, and across his legs was sprawled the heavy form of Fatty Hendry. It was the toppling over of the fat youth which had caused one of the cracks which were now so numerous in the ice.

"Hi! get off of me!" yelled Jack, and managed to pull one of his legs free; and with this he pushed the fat youth to one side.

"Help! help! We're going down!" came in a scream from May Powell.

The ice had become depressed where she and Ruth Stevenson stood, and both were already in a half inch of water.

"Scatter! Everybody scatter!" cried Professor Brice, and then rushed to one side, to rescue several little boys and girls.

"Come on, Jack, we've got to help those girls!" cried Randy, and caught his cousin by the arm,

thus assisting him to his feet. Then off the pair skated, with Andy and Fred behind them, all bent on going to the assistance of the girls from Clearwater Hall.

Now, I know quite well that to the readers of the former volumes in these two "Rover Boys Series," all of the Rovers, both old and young, will need no introduction. But for the benefit of those who have not perused any of the previous volumes in this line, a few words concerning our characters will not be amiss.

In my first volume, entitled "The Rover Boys at School," I told how three brothers, Dick, Tom and Sam Rover, had been sent off to Putnam Hall Military Academy, where they made a host of friends, including a manly and straightforward cadet, named Lawrence Colby. From Putnam Hall, the Rovers were sent to Brill College, and after leaving that institution of learning they went into business in Wall Street, New York City, where they organized The Rover Company, of which Dick was now president; Tom, secretary; and Sam, treasurer.

While at Putnam Hall the three Rovers had become acquainted with three charming girls, Dora Stanhope and her cousins Nellie and Grace Laning. This acquaintance had ripened into loving intimacy, and when Dick went into business

he had made Dora Stanhope his life-long partner. A short while after this Tom married Nellie Laning and Sam married Grace.

When first married, Dick and his beautiful wife Dora had begun housekeeping in a small apartment, but a few years later the three brothers had purchased a plot of ground on Riverside Drive, overlooking the Hudson river, and there they had built three handsome houses, Dick living in the middle house, and Tom on one side and Sam on the other.

Before the young people had moved into the new homes, Dick and Dora became the proud parents of a little son, who was named John, after Mr. Laning. The son was followed by a daughter, Martha, so named after her Great Aunt Martha of Valley Brook Farm, where the older boys had spent many of their youthful days. Little Jack, as he was called, was a bright lad with many of the qualities which had made his father so well liked and so successful in life.

About the time Jack's sister Martha was born, Tom and Nellie Rover came forward with twin boys, one of whom they named Anderson, after his grandfather, and the other Randolph, after Uncle Randolph, of Valley Brook Farm. Andy and Randy, as they were always called for short, were exceedingly clever and active lads, in this

particular being a second edition of their father. Andy was usually saying things that were more or less funny, and Randy thought that playing some trick was the finest thing in the world.

"You can't find fault with those kids, Tom," Dick Rover said more than once. "They are chips of the old block."

"Well, I suppose they are," Tom Rover would reply, with a twinkle in his eye. "But if they never do anything that is really mean or harmful, I won't care."

About the same time the twins were born, Sam and Grace Rover came along with a beautiful little girl, whom they named Mary, after Mrs. Laning. Then, a year later, the girl was followed by a sturdy little boy, who was christened Fred, after Sam Rover's old school chum, Fred Garrison.

Living so close together—the three stone mansions on Riverside Drive were connected—the younger generation of Rover boys, as well as the girls, were brought up very much like one big family. The winters were spent in New York City, while during the summer the young folks were generally bundled off to Valley Brook Farm, where their grandfather, Anderson Rover, still resided with his brother Randolph and wife Martha.

At first both the girls and the boys had been sent to private schools in the metropolis. But the boys showed such a propensity for "cutting up," as Dick Rover expressed it, that the fathers were compelled to hold a consultation.

"The best thing we can do is to send them to some strict boarding school," was Dick Rover's comment, and in this the brothers agreed.

Some time before, their old school chum, Lawrence Colby, who had since become a colonel in the state militia, had opened a military academy, which he called Colby Hall. The place was gaining an enviable reputation as a first-class institution of learning, being modeled after Putnam Hall, which, in its day, had been run somewhat on the lines of West Point.

"We'll send them to Colby Hall," had been the decision of the older Rovers, and to that place Jack, Andy and Randy, and Fred had gone, as related in detail in the volume entitled "The Rover Boys at Colby Hall."

The military school presided over by Colonel Colby was located about half a mile from the town of Haven Point, on Clearwater Lake, a beautiful sheet of water about two miles long and half a mile wide. At the head of the lake was the Rick Rack River, running down from the hills and woods beyond. The school consisted of

a large stone building shaped somewhat in the form of a cross, the upper portion facing the river. It was three stories in height, and contained, not only the classrooms and the mess hall, but also the dormitories and private rooms for the scholars. To one side was a brick building, which at one time had been a private dwelling, but which was now occupied by Colonel Colby and his family and some of the professors. On the opposite side was a new and up-to-date gymnasium. Down at the water's edge were a number of small buildings used as boathouses and bathhouses. Behind the Hall were a stable and a barn, and also a garage; and still further back there were a large vegetable garden and numerous farm fields.

On their arrival at Colby Hall, the Rover boys had found several of their friends awaiting them. One of these was Dick Powell, the son of Songbird Powell, a former schoolmate of their fathers, a fellow who was usually called Spouter because of his fondness for making speeches. Another lad was Gifford Garrison, usually called Gif for short, who was at the head of the school athletics. Gif was the son of Fred Garrison, after whom Fred Rover had been named.

They also made friends of a number of others, some of whom we have already met. These included Walter Baxter, the son of Dan Baxter,

who in years gone by had been an enemy to the older Rovers, but who had long since reformed.

Before coming to Colby Hall Jack Rover had had a quarrel in New York with a tall, dudish youth named Napoleon Martell, and this had almost led to a fight. Nappy Martell, as he was usually called by his cronies, was a pupil at the military academy, and soon he and his crony, a big, overgrown bully, named Slogwell Brown, did what they could to make life miserable for all of the Rovers. But in one of their dirty tricks they over-reached themselves, and as a consequence they had been exposed and sent away from the institution of learning for the time being.

"But they are coming back," Walt Baxter had told the Rover boys; "and they say when they do, they will make it hot for you."

"Well, when Slugger and Nappy return we will be ready for them," had been Jack Rover's reply.

"And the next time we won't be as easy on them as we were before," Fred had added.

All of the cadets formed a battalion of several companies, commanded by one of the older cadets, Major Ralph Mason. The Rovers took to the military drill and general exercises readily, and soon learned how to march and how to handle a gun. They enjoyed drilling very much—in fact,

they enjoyed it more than they did studying, although all of them were good scholars.

As has been stated, Colby Hall was located about half a mile out of Haven Point. On the other side of the town was located Clearwater Hall, a boarding school for girls. During a panic in a moving picture theater in the town, Jack and his cousins had become acquainted with a number of these girls, including Ruth Stevenson and May Powell. After that the four boys had taken four of the girls rowing on the lake and on other outings, and through this had become quite well acquainted with a number of the Clearwater Hall pupils. Jack was particularly interested in Ruth Stevenson, and thought her a very beautiful and entertaining young lady. The others did not seem to have any particular preference, although Fred was often seen to side up to May Powell, the entertaining cousin of Spouter.

And now, having introduced these young ladies in a proper manner, let us return to them at the time when they were struggling on the ice and in the midst of the frightened crowd rushing hither and thither, striving to save itself from being immersed in the icy waters of the lake.

"Oh! oh! What shall we do?" cried May in terror, as she clung to her companion's arm.

"Come on! We'll have to skate away from

here!" burst out Ruth. "Come! let us see if we can't get to shore," and she started off, her companion still clinging to her.

In the meanwhile, Jack and Randy were skating as fast as possible in the direction where they had seen the two girls. But now a crowd of cadets and town folks swept in front of them, and the next instant Randy was hurled flat on his back and went spinning across the smooth ice.

By this time one of the spots on the lake had broken through, and the water was rapidly rising all around it and covering the sinking surface. Men, women and children mingled with the cadets and hurried in all directions, but most of them toward the shore.

"Come on! We've got to help those girls somehow!" panted Jack, as he skated over to where Randy had been flung. He assisted his cousin to his feet just as Fred and Andy flashed up.

"The girls! Don't you see them over there? They are going down!" yelled Fred.

"Yes, I see them! Come on!" answered Jack.

As tired as he was because of the race, the oldest Rover struck out with all the vigor he could muster. Soon he found himself slishing through water that was several inches deep. The next moment he stood beside the two girls, who had become almost too frightened to move.

"Come on! Don't stand here!" he called, catching Ruth by the arm.

He looked back and saw that Fred and the others were close behind him, and that Fred already had hold of May. Then he started off up the lake.

"Oh, Jack, hadn't we better head for the shore?" gasped the frightened girl.

"No. There is too much of a crowd in that direction already," he answered quickly. "If they don't look out they'll all go in. Come on! The best thing to do is to get out where there isn't anybody."

He skated on, allowing the girl to rest on his arm as he did so. Soon they seemed to be out of the danger zone, and then he looked back.

The sight that met his gaze filled him with new alarm. Fred had been skating with May close beside him, but their feet had caught in one of the new cracks, and both of them had gone down headlong. Andy and Randy had been close behind, and now they too went sprawling, while the ice cracked ominously, as if ready to let them down into the water at any instant!

CHAPTER III

OUT OF PERIL

"Oh look! May and Fred have both gone down!" cried Ruth.

"Yes, and there go Andy and Randy over them!" exclaimed Jack.

"And look, Jack, the ice is cracking everywhere!" continued the frightened girl. She clutched his arm and looked appealingly into his face. "Oh! what shall we do?"

"Spread out, you fellows! Spread out!" yelled the oldest Rover boy. "Spread out! Don't keep together!"

His cry was heard, and an instant later Andy commenced to roll over on the ice in one direction while his twin rolled in another. In the meantime, Fred had managed to scramble to his feet, and now he pulled up May.

"Come on, we'll soon be out of danger," encouraged the youngest Rover; and, striking out, he pulled May behind him, the girl being too excited to skate.

In less than a minute the danger, so far as it concerned the Rovers and the two girls from Clearwater Hall, was past. All reached a point where the ice was perfectly firm. Here Ruth speedily gained her self-possession, but May continued to cling closely to Fred's arm.

"I'm going to see how they are making out in front of the boathouse!" cried Randy. "Some of the skaters must have gotten in."

"I'm with you," returned his twin. He looked back at his cousins. "I suppose you will look after the girls?"

"Sure!" answered Jack quickly. "Go ahead."

"I don't suppose we can be of any assistance down there?" came from Fred.

"I don't think so, Fred. There is too much of a crowd as it is; they will simply be in one another's way."

"Oh! oh! suppose some one should be drowned!" moaned May.

"Let us hope for the best," answered Jack. He did not want to add to the girls' fright, yet he was decidedly anxious over the outcome of the unexpected catastrophe.

They skated toward the shore at a point between Colby Hall and the town, and then they worked their way along shore up to the vicinity of the military academy. Here men and cadets

were rushing hither and thither, some with planks and others with ropes.

"Six of the cadets broke through," announced Spouter Powell, as he came up to learn if his cousin was safe.

"They are all out, aren't they?" questioned Jack quickly.

"Yes. But there may have been others that went under the ice. Professor Brice and Mr. Crews are going to make a thorough search." Crews was the gymnastic instructor.

The excitement continued for fully half an hour. By that time it was ascertained that every one had gotten off of the ice or out of the water in safety. Those who had gone down were rushed to shelter, so that they might not catch cold. Gradually the crowd dispersed, and then Professor Brice had danger signs placed at various points on the ice, so that there should not be a repetition of the accident.

"The thing would not have occurred had not the entire crowd happened to congregate around the winners of the skating race," explained Professor Brice to Colonel Colby.

"You think the ice is thick enough for any ordinary crowd?" questioned the master of the school anxiously.

"Yes, sir. You can test it for yourself."

"Well, we must be more careful in the future, Mr. Brice. We don't want any of our cadets drowned."

"We won't have any such crowd again if I can avoid it," was the reply.

"It's all nonsense to have such races anyway. It encourages too much rowdyism," was the comment of Asa Lemm, one of the language professors. Lemm was the least liked of all the teachers at the Hall. He did not believe in a boy's having any fun, but expected the cadets to spend their entire time in studying. He had once been fairly wealthy, and the loss of his money had made him sour-minded and disagreeable.

"I cannot agree with that opinion," returned Colonel Colby coldly. "The boys must have some exercise. And to be out in the fresh air is a very good thing for them. They will study so much the better for it."

"Maybe; but I doubt it," answered Asa Lemm shortly. "You let a boy go out and carouse around, and the first thing you know he won't care for anything else," and he strode away with his chin held high in the air and his lips tightly compressed. He was a man of very positive ideas, which he tried at every opportunity to impress upon others.

"Aren't your feet wet?" questioned Jack sud-

denly, as he looked down at the skating shoes worn by Ruth and May.

"Well, they are rather damp," answered Ruth.

"Mine are both wet and cold," said May. "I shouldn't mind it if I could dry them off and warm them somewhere."

"Come on up to the Hall," went on Jack. "I'm sure they will let you dry them in front of the open fire in the big living-room."

"Oh, Jack, we don't want to go there in such a crowd of cadets!"

"Don't worry about the cadets," put in Fred.

When they arrived at the living-room of the military academy, they found it practically deserted, the great majority of the cadets being at the lake front or in the big boathouse, where a pot stove was kept going for the benefit of the skaters.

"My, but this is a cozy place!" remarked Ruth, after she had become comfortably settled in a big armchair with her feet resting close to the blaze.

"I wish I was a cadet here," sighed May. "It's more fun being a boy than being a girl."

"How do you know? You never were a boy," returned Fred, with a grin.

"I know, just the same," May answered. "I'm sure you boys have a much better time of it than we girls."

This started quite an argument, in which all of the young people, including Spouter, joined. In the midst of the talk Andy and Randy came in, having been told where the others had gone.

"It's all over and everybody is safe," announced Randy.

"And the only thing lost, so far as we can find out, was Fatty's skating cap," put in Andy.

"Well, if that's all, we can chip in and buy him another cap," remarked Jack, and at this there was a short laugh. Now that the peril was a thing of the past all felt greatly relieved, and their manner showed it.

Jack and Fred had the pleasure of skating all the way to Clearwater Hall with Ruth and May. During that time the young folks grew quite confidential.

"Why don't you get your sister Martha to come to Clearwater Hall?" said Ruth to Jack. "I'm sure I'd like very much to meet her."

"Yes, and why not have your sister Mary come too?" added May to Fred.

"Say, that's a great idea!" burst out Jack.

"Let's put it up to the folks at home without delay," added his cousin. "But they might not like to leave the private school they are now attending," he continued, his face falling.

"That's true, for they are getting along very

nicely," said Jack. "Just the same, we can put it up to the folks at home and let them know all about what a nice place Clearwater Hall is—and what awfully nice girls there are here." And at this latter remark Ruth and May blushed.

"I sent a letter to Mary a year or two ago," said May; "but at that time I wasn't here. I think I'll send her another letter."

"Do, by all means," returned Fred quickly. "And let her know all about how nice a place it is. That may help."

"It would be a fine thing if they were at this school—it would give us more chances to call here," remarked Jack to Ruth.

"Last week I met Cousin Dick in town," said May, "and he was telling me how that Slugger Brown and Nappy Martell had left the Hall. He said the pair were terribly down on all you Rovers."

"Yes, they were very much enraged over the way we exposed them," answered Fred.

"They deserved to be exposed!" cried Ruth. "The idea of their shooting two of Mr. Lacy's valuable cows and then trying to prove that you did it! It was shameful!"

"Well, their folks had to pay Lacy for the cows," answered Jack.

"And then to think how they tampered with

the chains on that lumber raft so that the raft went to pieces in that storm on the lake!" added May. "Oh, I think they must be very wicked boys!"

"They are certainly no angels."

"Jack, if they should come back to Colby Hall, won't you be afraid that they will try to do something more to get you into trouble?"

"More than likely they will; but I am not afraid of them."

"We intend to keep our eyes wide open, and if Slugger or Nappy try any funny work, we'll jump on 'em like a ton of bricks," added Fred.

Then the subject was changed, and a few minutes later the cadets bid the girls good-bye, promising to see them again if possible in the near future.

"I'll tell you what, Jack, they are a pair of mighty fine girls," was Fred's comment, as he and his cousin skated back in the direction of the military academy.

"I agree with you, Fred."

"I wish we could persuade Martha and Mary to go to Clearwater Hall," went on the youngest Rover boy, wistfully. "I'd like first rate to have 'em get better acquainted with May and get acquainted with the other girls there."

"We'll have to be careful how we write home

about it," cautioned his cousin. "If we aren't, they'll think we want them to come just on account of Ruth and May, and then they'll tease the life out of us."

"Oh, sure, we'll be careful! Just the same, it would be a fine boarding school for them. I don't think much of that fashionable private school where they are now going. Most of the girls there think more of how they are dressed and what dances they are learning than anything else."

"By the way, do you think Spouter knows more about what Slugger and Nappy intend to do than he told?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, perhaps he heard something, but didn't want to tell all of it for fear of alarming us."

"I don't think Spouter would do that. He knows well enough that we aren't afraid of that pair."

"Just the same, Fred, if they do come back we'll have to keep our eyes wide open, for they surely will do their best to put one over on us, and any fellows who would be mean enough to do what they have done, wouldn't hesitate to do worse."

"I can't understand why Colonel Colby is going to let them come back at all."

"Oh, I suppose he feels that he ought to give them at least one more chance. He probably remembers how Dan Baxter acted toward our fathers and the colonel himself, as well as their chums, and how Baxter afterwards reformed."

"Yes, that may be true. But when one fellow like Walt Baxter's father reforms, a dozen others remain as bad as ever, or grow worse. To my mind, there isn't much in the way of reform in Slugger Brown's make-up, or in Nappy Martell either."

"Oh, I agree with you there. Slugger Brown is nothing short of a brute, and Nappy Martell is as sly and vicious as any fellow I ever ran up against. We'll certainly have to watch them when they get back here."

CHAPTER IV

OUT HUNTING

After the excitement attending the skating races, matters moved along quietly at Colby Hall for several days. The Rover boys, as was their custom, paid close attention to their studies.

"We've got to make a record for ourselves," was the way Jack put it. "If we don't, our folks may take it in their heads to send us to some other boarding school, thinking Colonel Colby is too easy with us."

"And to take Jack away from this vicinity when he is getting so sweet on Ruth Steven——" began Randy, when he was cut short by a book flung by his cousin, landing on his shoulder.

"You cut out that talk, Randy!" cried Jack.

"Let's talk about the weather," murmured Andy, who had passed to the window. "Say, fellows, do you know, I think it's going to snow!"

"Hurrah! That means some fun snowballing!" cried Fred.

The snow came down all that night, and in the

morning covered the ground to the depth of several inches. A great many of the cadets rushed out in glee, and half a dozen impromptu snowballing matches were soon in progress.

It was almost time to go in for the morning session when several of the cadets noticed a figure, huddled up in a slouch hat and a heavy overcoat, coming up from behind the Hall toward a side door.

"Here comes Bob Nixon!" yelled one of the cadets, mentioning the name of Colonel Colby's chauffeur. "Let's give him a volley."

"Right you are!" exclaimed Andy gleefully.

"Stop! Can't you see——" commenced Jack, but before he could finish his sentence both Andy and Randy had let drive at the advancing figure. One snowball took the man in the shoulder and the other landed just below his left ear.

"Here! here! what do you mean by such proceedings?" cried the attacked individual in great wrath, and then, as he held up his head and pushed back his slouch hat, all saw that it was Asa Lemm.

"Great watermelons!" groaned Andy. "I thought sure it was Nixon!"

"I knew it wasn't, and that's why I tried to stop you," said Jack.

"Say, he's some mad," whispered Randy, as

the language teacher strode toward them. "I wonder what he'll do."

"How dare you boys attack me?" roared Asa Lemm, as he shook his fist at the crowd. "How dare you do it?"

"It was all a mistake, Mr. Lemm," said Randy meekly.

"We didn't know it was you—really we didn't," came from Andy. "We thought it was Bob Nixon. He likes to snowball with us."

"I do not believe a word of it!" cried the irate instructor. "How many of you threw at me?" he questioned, glaring at the crowd.

To this there was no immediate answer, and then Randy stepped forward.

"I did, for one," he said.

"And so did I," came from his twin.

"Anybody else?"

"No. We were the only ones, Professor," answered Randy. "And I hope you will overlook it this time," he continued. "We did not know it was you."

"Both of you report to me after school this afternoon," said the instructor harshly; and then without another word he turned and tramped off into the Hall.

"Now we are in for it, Andy," was Randy's dismal comment.

"Oh, well, he can't do any more than kill us," was the light-hearted reply of the other.

"Do you want to be killed, Andy?" quizzed Jack.

"I know what he'll do," was Randy's comment. "He'll keep us both in and give us extra lessons to learn." And in this surmise the fun-loving Rover boy was correct. For their rashness in snowballing the teacher they were made to stay in after school for two afternoons, and in addition had two extra pages of Latin to translate.

"He's a lemon, if ever there was one," was what Andy said after his punishment had come to an end. "Oh, wouldn't I just like to get square with him!"

"We'll have to think something up, Andy," answered his twin.

Following the first fall of snow, came another, but then the sun came out brightly, packing down the snow so that sleighing became quite popular.

"If we only had a big sleigh up here, we could go and get the girls from Clearwater Hall and give them a ride," said Fred one day to Jack.

"I was thinking we might hire a big sleigh in town some Saturday afternoon and do just that," answered his cousin. "I'll look into it the first chance I get."

Fred and Jack had not forgotten the sport they had had earlier in the season, when they had gone out with Frank Newberry and some others on a hunt for rabbits and other small game.

"The hunting season is still open, Fred," said Jack one day. "What do you say if we ask Colonel Colby for permission to go out."

"Suits me," answered his cousin quickly.

"Do you think Andy and Randy would like to go, too?"

"More than likely. They have been wanting to go ever since we brought down that game."

When the subject was mentioned to the twins, they quickly agreed that it would be a fine thing if they could all obtain permission to go on a hunting trip the coming Saturday. Colonel Colby was appealed to without delay.

"Well, boys, I have no objection to your going out," he said. "I know you all understand the use of firearms, and I know, also, that your fathers loved to go out in their day and hunt. And I did a little bit in that line myself," and he smiled faintly. "But I want you to be very careful in what you shoot at; and do your level best to keep out of trouble of all kinds," and he looked at Jack and Fred as he uttered the latter words.

"Getting into trouble before, Colonel Colby, wasn't our fault," answered Jack quickly.

"I know that."

"By the way, Colonel Colby, if it isn't asking too much, would you mind letting us know if Slugger Brown and Nappy Martell are really going to return here?" questioned Fred.

"They have asked for permission to come back —at least, their parents have asked for them— and I have the matter under consideration," answered the master of the Hall. He gazed questioningly at the Rovers. "I meant to mention this subject to you, and I am glad you have brought it up. In one way, I don't feel like having them here; but in another way I should like to give them another chance in case they feel like turning over a new leaf and making a fresh start. What do you boys think of it?"

For a moment all of the Rover boys were silent, looking at each other questioningly. Then the others showed that they expected Jack to speak.

"Well, if you want my candid opinion, it's just this, Colonel Colby," said the oldest Rover boy earnestly. "Personally I would much prefer to have Brown and Martell stay away from Colby Hall. But if you think they ought to be given another chance to make good here, why, I am sure I'm not going to stand in their way. Just the same, if they do come here, I'm going to

watch them pretty closely so that they won't be able to play any more of their dirty tricks."

"I shall not blame you for watching them, Rover. After what happened to you and your Cousin Fred, it is no more than right that you should be on your guard. Yet, I trust that you will give Brown and Martell a chance to prove themselves, provided they really do want to turn over a new leaf and make amends for what has happened."

"Oh, we'll give them plenty of chances to make good if it is in them; won't we?" and Jack turned to his cousins.

"Sure!" came in a chorus.

"Then that is settled, and I am glad of it. Now you have my permission to go on your hunting trip, and I trust you will bring down all the small game you desire. But, as I said before, be very careful. So far, I have allowed all of my pupils to go out hunting whenever they have so desired, and without any accidents happening. I don't want to break that record." And with these words the master of the Hall dismissed them.

This conversation took place on Thursday evening, and all day Friday the boys were anxiously looking forward to the proposed outing and wondering what the weather would prove to be.

They obtained permission to take two small rifles and two double-barreled shotguns belonging to the institution, and these they cleaned and oiled so that they would be in prime condition.

Saturday morning dawned bright and clear, and the four Rovers obtained their breakfast as early as the rules of the school permitted. Then, with game bags and guns slung over their shoulders, they set out on their skates up the lake shore and then along the Rick Rack River, the wind of the day previous having cleared large portions of the ice of snow.

"Come on, let's have a race!" cried Andy gleefully. Had he not been on his skates he would have attempted a handspring in the exuberance of his spirits.

"No racing to-day!" warned Jack. "You save your breath, Andy. We expect to skate and tramp a good many miles to-day before we get back to the school."

"All right, just as you say," answered his cousin, and then he began some horseplay with Fred, which came to a sudden end when the youngest Rover tripped him up and sent him plunging into a snowbank on the side of the narrow stream.

"Now let up, I tell you!" warned Jack. "You never want to try any horseplay when you are

tramping or skating along with a loaded gun. It's too dangerous. Remember what Colonel Colby said," and then Andy sobered down a little.

All too soon for the boys, the skating on the river came to an end. Beyond, the stream was little better than a rocky watercourse, now thickly covered with ice and snow.

"Why can't we leave our skates here until we come back?" suggested Randy.

"We could if we were sure we were going to return this way," answered Jack. "But we had better take them along, for we may return to the Hall by an entirely different route. We'll place our skates in our game bags for the present;" and this advice was followed.

After this the Rover boys trudged along through the woods bordering the stream. Soon they came upon some rabbit tracks, and less than a minute later Jack suddenly raised his double-barreled shotgun and blazed away.

"Hurrah! you've got him!" cried Fred, and all of the boys rushed forward to where the game lay—a big, fat rabbit.

"Say, Jack, you're the lucky one!" cried Andy. "Now you know what you promised?" he added.

"All right—it's your turn now to have the shotgun," answered his cousin, for that was the bargain which had been made. "I'll carry the rifle."

On and on went the young hunters, getting deeper and deeper into the woods. Here they managed to stir up more game, and Andy had the pleasure of bringing down the second rabbit, while the others laid low several squirrels.

"This is pretty rough ground around here," remarked Jack, after they had wound in and out around some exceedingly rough rocks and through some thick underbrush.

"We had better keep close to this stream," was Randy's suggestion. "If we don't, we may become hopelessly lost in these woods."

"Huh! I guess we could find our way out sooner or later," retorted his twin. To Andy, getting lost in the woods would seem nothing more than a big joke.

The young hunters continued to advance, and, during the course of the next hour, brought down several more rabbits, and also another squirrel. Then, just as Andy had handed back one of the shotguns to Jack and the weapon had been reloaded, they heard a strange noise coming from back of some bushes not a great distance away.

"Now what do you suppose that is?" whispered Fred.

"I think I know, Fred," was Jack's reply; "and if I am right, get ready to fire as soon as I do."

The two boys with the shotguns went in advance, and soon reached a point where they could look beyond the bushes. Then came a sudden whirr, and up into the air went a small flock of pheasants.

Bang! bang! rang out Jack's fowling piece, and bang! bang! came the report of Fred's firearm.

The strange whirring continued, but then three of the birds were seen to drop to the ground, one dead and the other two seriously wounded.

"Hurrah! we've got three of them!" cried Fred excitedly, and then ran forward, to quickly put the wounded birds out of their misery.

"Say, that's some luck!" exclaimed Randy. "If I——"

Randy stopped short, and so did some of the others who had started to speak. A strange sound from a distance had reached their ears.

"Help! help!" came in a low cry. "Help! For heaven's sake, somebody come and help me!"

CHAPTER V

UNCLE BARNEY STEVENSON

"WHAT is that?"

"It's somebody calling for help!"

"It's a man's voice; and he must be in pretty bad shape to call like that!" burst out Jack.

"Hello there!" yelled Randy. "Where are you?"

"Here! Under the fallen tree!" came in a faint cry. "Help me, quick!"

"I think the cry came from that direction," said Andy, pointing with his hand.

"And I think it came from over there," added his twin, pointing off at a right angle to the first direction given.

"I think Andy is right!" exclaimed Jack. "Anyway, he and I can go off in that direction, while you, Randy, and Fred can see if you can locate him over yonder."

Neither of the boys had been exactly right in locating the cry for assistance, which had come from a point about midway between the two

places suggested, but it was Jack who saw a large fallen tree from a distance and ran quickly toward it, yelling for all of the others to do likewise.

The sight which met their gaze filled them with a pity and a strong desire to be of assistance. There, in the snow, lay an elderly man, clad in the garb of a hunter or lumberman, with a shotgun and a well-worn game bag beside him. Over the man's legs and one outstretched arm, rested the upper portion of a large pine tree, which had evidently crashed down because of the weight of snow upon it but a short time before. The man lay on his chest, and it was all he could do to raise his head to cry for aid.

"Say, this is tough!" exclaimed Andy, as he reached the spot. "What can we do to help him?"

"We've got to pry up that tree somehow," answered Jack.

"Come on; let us see if we can't lift it!" exclaimed Randy, and took hold of one of the numerous branches.

The others did the same, and all pulled upon the tree with their utmost strength. Yet, it was too heavy for them and could scarcely be budged.

"We've got to get some kind of pry and pry it up," announced Jack. "I wish we had brought a hatchet along. I meant to bring one, so that we could make firewood, but I forgot it."

"Help me! Help me!" moaned the man. "Don't leave me here pinned down like this;" and then he seemed to faint.

Alarmed by the condition of the sufferer, the boys ran around the spot looking for something which might aid them in releasing the man. They found several flat stones, and then discovered a sapling which they succeeded in pulling up by the roots. Piling up the flat stones close to the fallen tree, they placed the sapling upon them, using it as a lever, and by this means Jack and the twins managed to raise the fallen pine just high enough to allow Fred to haul the hurt man from under it. Then they let the pine slip back to its original position.

"Looks to me as if he might have his two legs broken, and maybe his arm," announced Jack, after they had placed the man on his back with his head raised on some pine boughs stripped from the trees. The sufferer's eyes were closed, and he breathed heavily.

"We ought to get a doctor for him just as soon as possible," said Randy. "But where to go for one, excepting back to Haven Point, I don't know."

While the young hunters were wondering what they had better do, the man slowly opened his eyes and gave a gasp.

"Help me! Please help me!" he cried feebly.

"Don't excite yourself, you're all right now," answered Jack kindly. "Take it easy. We'll do what we can for you."

The man had closed his eyes again, but now he opened them and tried to look around him.

"You got me clear of the fallen tree, did you?" he murmured. "Good! I was afraid I'd have to stay there until I froze to death."

"How about it? Can you use your left arm?" questioned Jack.

"I don't know. I guess so," answered the man, and then tried to raise the arm in question. He held it up for a few seconds, but then let it drop heavily by his side.

"It's pretty well lamed I reckon," he said. "You see, I had it right under one of the tree limbs."

"What about your legs? Can you move them at all?" went on the oldest Rover boy. He did not have the heart to mention that the man's lower limbs might be broken.

Feebly, the man raised up first one leg and then the other. The limbs had not been broken, but they were much bruised and swollen, and the movements caused the sufferer to give a groan.

"I'm afraid I'm done up so far as walking is concerned," he said dolefully. "You see, I'm get-

ting old," he went on. "If I was a younger man, maybe this wouldn't affect me quite so much. But as it is——" He shook his head dismally.

"I guess you had better let us carry you out of the woods," said Jack. "You can't walk, and you certainly can't stay here alone."

"Do you know where the nearest house is located?" questioned Randy.

"Let me see——" The man mused for a moment, shutting his eyes while he did so. "Unless I'm greatly mistaken, Bill Hobson lives on the edge of the woods just to the north of this spot."

"Is he a farmer?" questioned Fred.

"No, he's a lumberman, like myself," was the reply. The man looked from one to another of the youths. "May I ask who you are?"

"We're the Rover boys," answered the oldest of the four. "I am Jack Rover, and these are my cousins, Fred, Andy, and Randy."

"Glad to know you, boys; and doubly glad to think you were up in this section of the woods just when I had this accident. I sha'n't forget your kindness. My name is Stevenson, but most all the folks that know me call me Uncle Barney. I take it from your uniforms that you belong at Colby Hall."

"We do," answered Andy.

"I don't belong in this neighborhood. I just

came over early this morning to see what the hunting looked like around here. My home is on Snowshoe Island, in the middle of Lake Monona, about ten miles north of here."

"I think you had better rest on some of these pine boughs while some of us try to locate the Bill Hobson you mentioned," said Jack. "Can you point out the general direction of his place?"

"It's up along this mountain stream," and Barney Stevenson indicated the Rick Rack River. "You just follow that watercourse for about a quarter of a mile, and I'm pretty sure you'll come to it."

"Well, if you're sure it's along this stream, we might as well try to get you there first as last," announced Randy. He turned to his cousins. "Why can't we take turns in carrying him, either on our backs or on a litter?"

"I think we had better try to make some sort of litter of pine boughs," answered Jack. "It will be much easier for the four of us to do the carrying than for one."

"I've got a hatchet in my game bag, and you can cut some pine boughs with that. And you will find some cord in my game bag, too."

"How did the accident happen, if I may ask?" questioned Randy, while Jack began to trim several large boughs from the fallen pine.

"It came quicker'n lightning," was the old lumberman's answer. "I had just spotted a fine, fat rabbit, and was taking aim, when, without warning, the tree gave a sudden snap like the report of a gun, and down it came right on top of me. Of course, I tried to jump out of the way, but my foot caught on a tree root, or a rock, or something, and down I went, and the next minute the tree came down on top of me, right across my legs and my left arm, like when you found me. I tried to pull myself loose, but my legs and my arm seemed to be wedged down between the tree and some stones, and I couldn't budge nary a one of 'em."

"I guess you can be thankful that you didn't break your arm or your legs."

"I suppose that's true, my boy. Just the same, I suppose this will lay me up for a week or two, and maybe longer," answered Barney Stevenson, dubiously.

Having cut several pine boughs that looked as if they might answer the purpose, the four boys lost no time in twisting them together and then tying them into a rude litter. Across this they laid additional pine boughs, and upon these placed the form of the hurt man. When they moved him he shut his teeth hard, evidently to keep from crying out with pain.

"I know it must hurt you, Mr. Stevenson," said Jack kindly. "We'll be just as careful as possible."

"I know you'll be, my lads. I suppose I ought to have a doctor, but if I can get to Bill Hobson's cabin, I guess I'll be all right. Bill will most likely have some liniment, and that will fix me up."

With the old lumberman resting on the litter and the four youths carrying this as carefully as possible, the party made its way along the Rick Rack River, which at this point was little better than a mountain torrent. They had considerable difficulty in climbing over the rocks and in making their way through the heavy brushwood, but finally they came out to a cleared space, beyond which there were only scattered patches of trees.

"I see some smoke!" cried Fred presently.

"That must be the smoke from Bill Hobson's place," announced the old lumberman, and then he closed his eyes once more and lay back on the litter, for the pain he was suffering was great.

Keeping on in the direction where they had seen the smoke, they soon came in sight of a fairly large cabin with a lean-to attached. They marched up to the place, and Jack rapped upon the door, which was opened a moment later by a burly man, well along in years.

"What do you want?" began the man, and then looked past Jack to the litter and the old lumberman lying on it. "What's this? Why, it's Uncle Barney, I declare! What's happened?"

"I got hurt by a falling tree, Bill," was the reply. "And if it hadn't been for these cadets, I might be layin' down in the woods yet."

"He is quite a bit hurt," explained Jack. "You had better let us carry him in and place him on a couch or a bed of some kind."

"Surest thing you know, young man," answered Bill Hobson. "Fetch him right in," and he turned to make a bunk ready for the sufferer.

Fortunately the cabin was well warmed, so that as soon as they had Barney Stevenson safe inside, they lost no time in taking off some of his clothing and examining his hurts. The other old lumberman, assisted by Jack, did this, and Hobson examined the condition of his friend with care.

"I can't see that anything is broken," he announced; "but those bruises are pretty bad. I think I'll bathe 'em with hot water, and then put on some liniment and bind 'em up."

"I guess I'll have to stay right where I am for a spell, Bill," said the hurt man.

"That's what, Uncle Barney. And you're welcome to stay as long as you please," announced

the owner of the cabin. The boys had brought along the old lumberman's game bag and shotgun.

Bill Hobson wanted to know the particulars of the affair, and the Rover boys related how they had come up into the woods to hunt and heard Barney Stevenson's cries for assistance, and how they had liberated him and brought him along on the litter.

"I'm very thankful indeed to you," said Barney Stevenson, and his face showed his gratitude. "If I can ever do you boys a good turn, believe me, I'll do it."

"Didn't you say you lived on Snowshoe Island?" queried Jack.

"Yes."

"I've heard of the place, but I don't know exactly where it is located or why they call it Snowshoe Island."

"It's a big island located almost in the middle of Lake Monona," answered the old lumberman. "I own the place, and it's called Snowshoe Island because some years ago a number of Indians lived on it and made their living by making snowshoes. The Indians are all gone now."

"I guess, Uncle Barney, you've lived on that island a good number of years," put in Bill Hobson.

"Twelve years coming this Christmas," was the reply. "I went there the day after my wife was buried," and the old lumberman's face clouded as if the memory of what had happened was still bitter.

"Do you do any lumbering there?" questioned Randy, more to change the subject than for any other reason.

"Oh, yes; I do quite some lumbering during the season. I have a firm in the city that sends up there every year for all the stuff I cut. At this time of year, I like to go out hunting. It's the one sport that I thoroughly enjoy. And I reckon you boys enjoy it, too, or you wouldn't be out with your guns."

"Yes, we like to go hunting once in a while."

"Well, now, listen to me, boys. You saved my life out there in the woods, and if I was real well off, I'd try to reward you for it. But, as it is——"

"We don't want any reward," broke in Jack quickly.

"I know you don't—you're not that kind. And I'm not going to offend you by offering it. Just the same, if you ever feel like coming over to Snowshoe Island and paying me a visit, I'll treat you as well as I know how."

"Maybe we might be able to go over there and

do some hunting some time," suggested Andy.

"Yes, you come over some time and stay a few days or a week with me, and I'll give you the best time hunting I can," answered Barney Stevenson.

"By the way, Mr. Stevenson," said Jack curiously, "do you know a Mr. Frederic Stevenson?" Jack had learned from Ruth that that was her father's name.

At this unexpected question, the old lumberman opened wide his eyes and glared at the young cadet.

"Yes, I know him—very well," he growled. "But I don't want to hear anything about him—not a word! Is he a friend of yours?"

"He is the father of one of the young ladies who is a pupil at Clearwater Hall."

"Oh, I see! Humph! Well, I don't want to hear anything about Fred Stevenson, and if you want to be friends with me, you needn't mention his name to me again," went on the old lumberman, much to the surprise of the Rover boys.

CHAPTER VI

DEEP IN THE WOODS

"WHAT do you suppose was the reason that old lumberman didn't want to hear Mr. Stevenson's name mentioned?" questioned Randy of Jack, about half an hour later, when the four cadets were tramping through the woods again to resume their hunting.

"I'm sure I don't know, Randy," was the slow reply. "Evidently he was very bitter over something."

"Having the same name, it looks to me as if this Uncle Barney, as they call him, might be some relative of Ruth's family," said Fred.

"More than likely."

"Maybe he's some cast-off relation, who got into trouble with them and then took himself off to that Snowshoe Island," was Fred's comment.

"I'd have asked him some more questions if he hadn't acted so ugly about it," went on Jack.

"Yes. But he seemed to be a very nice sort of man otherwise," put in Andy quickly.

"I agree with you there." Jack gave a little sigh. "There must be some mystery to it."

"Why don't you ask Ruth about it some time?"

"I will, when I get a good chance to do it. Of course, if it's some sort of family affair, I'm not going to butt in."

Before the Rover boys had left the cabin of Bill Hobson, they had been assured by old Uncle Barney that he was feeling fairly comfortable and that the owner of the place would look after him until he recovered. Barney Stevenson had mentioned Snowshoe Island several times, and had told the boys again that he was sorry he could not reward them for coming to his assistance, but that if they ever cared to visit his island, he would do his best to make them feel at home and show them where the best hunting in that vicinity was to be had. He had also mentioned the fact that there was a vacant cabin close to his own on the island, and that they would be welcome to camp out there at any time they chose to do so.

"I'd like to visit his place some time," said Fred, "just to see how the old fellow lives. I'll bet he's got quite a comfortable outfit there."

"He may live in very queer style," returned Randy. "According to what he says, and what that Bill Hobson told me, he must be a good deal of a hermit."

"Maybe he committed some sort of crime and the other Stevensons cast him off," suggested Andy.

"Oh, I can't think that! He didn't look to be a criminal," returned Jack. "Don't you remember what he said about taking up his residence on the island after his wife died? Maybe that loss made him feel as if he didn't want to mingle with the rest of the world."

The boys talked the matter over for some time, but could reach no conclusion whatever regarding the way the old lumberman had acted when Frederic Stevenson's name had been mentioned. Then, however, they stirred up some more squirrels and rabbits, and in the excitement of the chase that subject, for the time being, was forgotten.

They had brought a lunch with them, and at noon they found a convenient spot and there built a small campfire, over which they made themselves a can of hot chocolate, and this, with some sandwiches and some doughnuts, constituted the repast. Andy wanted to take time to clean a couple of the squirrels and cook them, but Jack and the others were afraid this would take too long, and so the idea had to be abandoned.

"Gee! but this tramping through the woods gives a fellow an appetite!" cried Andy, after he

had eaten his second sandwich and his third doughnut. "I could eat a whole rabbit or a squirrel myself." And then, feeling in fine fettle, he proceeded to pull himself up on a near-by tree limb and "skin the cat," as it is called by acrobatic boys.

"You look out, young man, that you don't tumble down on your head," warned Jack. "This ground around here is frozen pretty hard."

"If I tumble, I know where I'll land," cried Andy gleefully; and, swinging himself back and forth on the tree limb, he suddenly let go and came down straight on Jack's shoulders. Both went down in the snow, and there rolled over and over, each trying to get the better of the other. Then Fred commenced to snowball the fallen pair, and Randy joined in; and a moment later there began a snowball fight on the part of all four which lasted about ten minutes.

"Cease firing!" cried Fred at last, as he dug some of the snow out of his left ear. "If this is going to be a snowballing contest, all right; but I thought we were out to do some hunting."

"Fred surrenders, and the war is over!" cried Jack.

"Hoist the milk-blue flag and call it off!" burst out Andy gleefully. "Throw the snowballs into the ice-cream freezer and season to taste!"

After that the four young hunters packed up their belongings and saw to it that the campfire was completely extinguished. Then they continued on their tramp in the vicinity of the Rick Rack River.

"I'm getting tired of hanging around this watercourse," said Fred finally. "I believe the reports of our guns have driven all the remaining game away. Why can't we strike off into the woods yonder and come in on the other side of Haven Point?"

They noted the position of the sun with care, and then struck off at right angles to the river. Soon they found themselves going up hill and presently struck a lumberman's trail leading down in the direction of the town. Here, however, after two hours of hunting, they failed to find any game whatever.

"We didn't improve things by coming over here," grumbled Andy.

"Now I guess we had better be thinking of getting back to the school," said Jack, as he consulted his watch. They had been told that they must return in time for the evening meal.

"All right, I'm ready to go," came from Fred. "Gosh! I wish I had a horse to ride, or something." The many miles of tramping had wearied him greatly.

"My left foot is beginning to hurt me a little," put in Randy. "I slipped on the rocks this morning when we were carrying that old Uncle Barney. I didn't think much of it at the time, but now it's growing quite lame."

"You can walk on it, can't you?" questioned Jack anxiously.

"Oh, yes, I can walk; but I can't go any too fast—or any too far, either."

The boys had done their best to keep track of where they were going, and now they turned in what they thought was the direction of Haven Point. But, as my young readers may have heard, it is an easy matter to lose one's sense of direction in the woods, and before they knew it, they found themselves in a locality that was entirely strange to them.

"We don't seem to be getting much closer to town," announced Fred presently. "I don't see a farmhouse of any sort in sight."

They had gone but a short distance when they stirred up several more rabbits, and had the pleasure of bringing two of the creatures down. Then they came to a small clearing, and beyond this some farm fields.

"Now we must be getting to somewhere," announced Randy; and a few minutes later a turn of the road brought them in sight of a farmhouse.

Here they saw a farmer coming from a cowshed with a pail of foaming milk, and accosted him.

"Sure, you're on the road to Haven Point," answered the farmer, in reply to their question. "It's about two miles and a half from here. But do you want to go to the Point or to Colby Hall?" he went on, noticing their uniforms.

"We want to get to the Hall—and by as short a route as possible," answered Jack.

"Then the best thing you lads can do is to come right through my lane here and go across the back field. Then you will come out on the road that runs from the Hall to Carwell. I guess you know that?"

"Oh, yes; we know that road," returned Randy.

The cadets thanked the farmer for his information, and lost no time in following his directions. Soon they came out on the other highway, and then started forward as rapidly as their somewhat weary legs would permit.

When they reached the vicinity of Colby Hall Jack found, by again consulting his watch, that they were almost three-quarters of an hour late.

"Let's see if we can't slide in without any of the teachers seeing us," suggested Andy.

"Oh, I don't know that we've got to do that, Andy," returned Jack. "We haven't done anything wrong."

"Well, we are late, and you know some of the teachers won't stand for that."

"We had permission to go hunting, and we couldn't help it getting lost up there in the woods," answered his twin.

They were just about to enter one of the side doors of the Hall, when it was flung open and they found themselves confronted by one of the younger teachers, accompanied by Professor Lemm. They stepped to one side to let the teachers pass.

"Yes, as I remarked before, Tompkins, unless you have strict discipline in that class——" Asa Lemm was saying, when, of a sudden, he happened to glance at the cadets and recognized the Rovers. "What are you doing here? Where have you been?" he demanded, coming to an abrupt halt.

"We've been out hunting, sir," answered Jack.

"Hunting, eh?" And as was usual with him, Asa Lemm drew down the corners of his mouth.

"We had permission from Colonel Colby to go," put in Randy.

"Ah, well, in that case——" Asa Lemm paused for a moment. "Did he say you could stay out as late as this?" he added suddenly.

"We had permission to stay out until supper time," answered Jack.

"Don't you know it is an hour after that time now, Rover?"

"Three-quarters of an hour, Professor. We might have been on time, only my cousin here slipped on the rocks and hurt his ankle, and that has delayed us a little."

"Humph! always some excuse! You boys have got to learn to be on time. You'll never get through life unless you are punctual. I shall mention the fact of your being late to Colonel Colby. Now go in at once, and if you are too late to get anything to eat, it will be your own fault;" and thus speaking, Asa Lemm moved on with the other teacher.

"Oh, but he's the sourest old lemon that ever grew!" was Andy's comment.

"You never said anything truer than that, Andy," answered his twin.

CHAPTER VII

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING

"Say, fellows, did you ever hear this song?"

It was Ned Lowe who spoke. He sat in one of the rooms belonging to the Rovers. On his knee rested a mandolin which he had been strumming furiously for the past ten minutes.

"Sure we've heard it, Ned!" cried Andy. "What is it?"

"For gracious sake, Ned! why don't you let up?" cried Fred, who was in the next room trying his best to study. "How in the world is a fellow going to do an example in algebra with you singing about good times on the old plantation?"

"That is right, Ned. Why don't you sing about good times in the classroom when Asa Lemm is there?"

"Gee Christopher! what's the use of your throwing cold water on this camp meeting?" came from Walt Baxter, who sat on the edge of the bed munching an apple.

"Really, it's a shame the way you young gen-

tlemen attempt to choke off Ned's efforts to please this congregation!" exclaimed Spouter Powell, who sat in an easy chair with his feet resting on the edge of a chiffonier. "Now, when a man's soul is overflowing with harmony, and beautiful thoughts are coursing through his cranium, and he is doing his utmost to bring pleasure——"

"Wow! Spouter is at it again! Somebody choke him off!" cried Randy, and catching up a pillow, he threw it at the head of the cadet who loved to make long speeches.

"Say, fellows, why won't some of you let me get a word in edgeways?" came from Dan Soppinger, who stood with his back against the door leading to the hall. "I've been wanting to ask you a question for the last ten minutes. Who of you can tell me the names of the fifth, tenth, and fifteenth presidents of our country?"

"Oh, baby!" wailed Andy, throwing up his hands in comic despair. "Dan is worse than either Spouter or Ned."

"I thought you were going to put a padlock on that question box of yours, Dan," remarked Fred.

"I'll bet there isn't one of you can answer my question," retorted Dan Soppinger.

"Sure! I can answer it!" returned Andy readily. "What was that question? Who was the first laundryman in Chicago?"

"No; I said, who were the fifth, the tenth, and the fifteenth——"

"Oh! I remember now—the fifth, tenth and fifteenth discoverers of the North Pole. That's easy, Dan. The fifth was Julius Cæsar, the tenth, Benjamin Frank——"

"See here! I didn't say a word about the North Pole discoverers!" ejaculated the Human Question Box. "I said the fifth, tenth and fifteenth——"

"Men to find out how to manufacture oleomargarine out of pure butter," finished Andy. "Now that's a purely scientific problem, Dan, not an ordinary question. You want to take three pounds of oleomargarine and divide them by two pounds of unadulterated butter, then——"

"For gracious sake! has that boy gone crazy?" cried Dan Soppinger in despair. "I come over here and ask an ordinary question in history——"

"How do we know it's an ordinary question in history?" broke in Randy. "The five, ten and fifteen sounds like a problem in higher arithmetic."

"Say, Dan, just forgive me for what I said, and I'll send you the answer day after yesterday on a postal card," announced Andy mournfully. "And I'll prepay the postage, too. Now, be a good boy, Son, and run along, and maybe some time papa will buy you a lemon stick," and at this

remark there was a general laugh, in the midst of which Dan Soppinger threw up his hands, turned and left the room.

It was several days after the hunting expedition, and the Rover boys had settled down once more to their studies. This was the off hour in the evening, and, as was usual, a number of their friends had dropped in to see them.

"Only three weeks more to the winter holidays," announced Gif presently. "What are you fellows going to do with yours?"

"We haven't decided yet, Gif, any further than that we're going home," answered Jack.

"If you feel like it, you had better come and pay me a visit. I know my folks would be only too glad to have you."

"And we'd be glad to have you come down to New York and stay with us, Gif," was the reply.

During the days that had gone by since the hunt, the Rover boys had had several little differences with Professor Lemm. The teacher had spoken to Colonel Colby about their coming in late, but the master of the Hall had passed this matter over as being of no importance, somewhat to Asa Lemm's chagrin.

"Oh, how I love that man!" had been Andy's comment.

The weather had remained clear, but on Thurs-

day of that week came another fall of snow, and by Friday this was in good condition for sleighing.

"I wonder if we can't get up a sleighing party for Saturday afternoon and take out some of the girls from Clearwater Hall?" said Jack.

"We ought to be able to get some sort of box-sled down at the Haven Point livery stable," answered Randy. "Suppose we call the liveryman up on the 'phone and see what he has to say, and then call up the girls?"

This was done without delay, and, as a result, it was arranged that the liveryman should call at the school early Saturday afternoon for the four boys and some of their chums, bringing with him a large box-sled drawn by four horses. Then the boys were to get the girls, and all were to take a ride until the supper hour. It was arranged that the four Rovers should go on the ride, and also Spouter Powell, Gif Garrison, Fatty Hendry, and some others.

"Of course, Fatty, we really ought to make you pay double price," remarked Andy to the fat boy, when the arrangements were being made.

"Nothing doing," grunted Fatty. "I don't weigh a bit more than Spouter or Gif."

"Oh, no, not at all—only about sixty pounds more!" remarked Gif.

Some of the girls attending Clearwater Hall had stated that they wished to do a little shopping in Haven Point before going on the ride, and so all had promised to meet the boys in front of the moving picture theater, which was a resort well-known to all of them.

"Now if the weather only remains good, we ought to have a peach of a time," announced Randy, after all the arrangements had been settled.

The weather remained good, and promptly on time the liveryman drove up to the entrance of the Hall with his big box-sled, which he had filled with straw and robes. Into the sled piled the boys, Fatty Hendry perching himself up on the front seat beside the driver.

Some of the lads had provided themselves with tin horns, and they set off on the trip with a grand flourish, a number of the cadets left behind gazing after them wistfully. But these lads were not utterly disconsolate, for the reason that skating and coasting were now both very good around the school.

The horses pulling the box-sled were fine animals, and in a short space of time they jangled merrily into Haven Point, the boys blowing their horns loudly to attract attention.

In the meantime, Ruth Stevenson and May

Powell, accompanied by Alice Strobell, Annie Larkins, and some of their chums from Clearwater Hall, had arrived in the town and gone to several of the stores on various errands. Then, a few minutes before the time appointed for meeting the cadets, they hurried over in the direction of the moving picture theater.

Several of the girls went into a drugstore close to the theater, leaving Ruth and May standing on the sidewalk, looking at the various gaudy billboards which were displayed there. The girls were discussing the picture of a well-known moving-picture actress, when suddenly Ruth felt some one touch her arm. Turning, she found herself confronted by a tall, heavy-set youth, rather loudly dressed, and accompanied by another boy, wearing a fur cap and fur-lined overcoat.

"Excuse me, but this is Miss Ruth Stevenson, I believe?" said the big youth, with a broad smile on his coarse face.

Ruth was not at all pleased by being thus addressed, for she had recognized the fellow as Slugger Brown, and also recognized Nappy Martell. Nappy raised his cap and bowed pleasantly, both to her and to May.

"We just got back to Haven Point," said Slugger Brown smoothly. "Been away a short while, you know."

"And we thought we would go into the movies before going back to school," put in Nappy Martell. "Were you going in, too? If you were, let's go in together. I'll get the tickets," and he opened his coat to thrust his fingers into his vest pocket and bring forth a small roll of bills.

"Thank you, we are not going into the theater," answered May stiffly. She did not like either Slugger or Nappy, and was sorry the pair had shown themselves.

"How about it?" broke out Slugger, taking hold of Ruth's arm in a decidedly familiar way. "Let's go in. You've got time enough."

"Thank you, but we have something else to do, Mr. Brown," responded Ruth icily.

"You can't do much outside on a cold day like this," went on the bully. "Come on in—I'm sure it's nice and warm in there, and they've got some dandy pictures. Come ahead."

"Sure!" broke out Nappy. "I'll get the tickets," and he took several steps toward the ticket booth.

"Thank you, but I said I didn't want to go with you," said May, quite loudly and with flashing eyes.

"We pick our company when we go anywhere," added Ruth, giving Slugger Brown a look which would almost have annihilated any ordinary boy.

But the bully was proof against anything of that sort.

"Oh, you needn't get on your high horse about it, Ruth Stevenson," he sneered. "Some day maybe you'll be glad to go to a show with me."

"If you won't go, I guess there are other girls just as good, and maybe better," added Nappy Martell, not knowing what else to say.

It was at this moment that the big box-sled containing the cadets hove into sight. With a flourish, the driver drew up to the curb with the boys tooting loudly on their tin horns, but this salute came to a sudden end when the lads caught sight of their former schoolmates.

"Look who's here, will you!" ejaculated Randy.

"Slugger Brown and Nappy Martell," murmured Fred.

"Say, they are talking to Ruth and May!" broke in Andy.

To all this Jack said nothing. But he lost no time in leaping to the pavement and walking up to the girls, who came forward to greet him.

"Oh, I'm so glad you got here!" exclaimed Ruth in a low voice, and she looked at Jack appealingly and then let her eyes rove in the direction of the bully and his crony.

"Those boys are just too horrid for anything!" murmured May, by way of explanation.

"What did they do?" demanded Spouter of his cousin, he having quickly followed Jack from the sled.

"They almost insisted upon it that we accompany them into the movies!"

"Why, they hardly know you!"

"That's true, Dick. And I think it was awful of them, the way they came up."

"That Brown boy caught me by the arm, and he had no right to do that," said Ruth to Jack. "I don't want a thing to do with him."

"You get into the sled, girls, and we'll tend to Brown and Martell," announced Spouter, and the tone of his voice showed his anger.

The girls did as bidden, being assisted by the others; and, in the meantime the remaining girls came from the store and also got into the sled. Spouter and Jack strode across the pavement, and caught Slugger Brown and Nappy Martell just as they were on the point of dropping their tickets into the ticket box.

"Come here a minute. I want to talk to you," said Spouter, catching Martell by the arm.

"And I want to talk to you," added Jack, as he detained Slugger Brown.

"I won't talk to you," retorted Nappy Martell, and tried to pass.

"Yes, you will!" answered Spouter. "You lis-

ten to me, Nappy! After this you leave my cousin, May Powell, alone. If you don't, you'll have an account to settle with me."

"And you leave both of those girls alone!" said Jack to Slugger Brown. "Miss Stevenson doesn't want anything to do with you. Now, you mind what I'm telling you, or you'll get into trouble the first thing you return to the Hall!"

"Oh, say, Rover, you make me tired!" sneered the bully, glaring at Jack. "I'm not going to try to take your girl away from you. There are plenty of better girls around Haven Point. You go about your business and leave me alone;" and, thus speaking, Slugger Brown passed into the moving-picture theater, followed a moment later by Nappy Martell. The two others watched them out of sight, and then looked at each other knowingly.

"One fine pair, believe me!" was Spouter's comment.

"I'm mighty sorry Colonel Colby allowed them to return to the Hall," answered Jack. "I'm afraid it spells just one thing—Trouble!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE SLEIGHING PARTY

"WHAT did you say to those horrid young men?" asked May, after Jack and Spouter had returned to the box-sled and the driver had picked up the reins and started through the main street of Haven Point.

"Oh, we told them to mind their own business after this," answered Jack.

"And if they don't, you let me know, and we'll attend to them," said Spouter to his cousin.

"It's too bad, Jack, they came back to Colby Hall," remarked Ruth.

"Right you are! But Colonel Colby wanted to give them another chance. He asked us about it, and we didn't want to stand in the way of Slugger and Nappy turning over a new leaf."

"Hi there—somebody start a song!" cried Andy, who caught a few words of what was said, and thought the occasion was getting too serious.

"That's the talk!" exclaimed Alice Strobel.

"What shall we sing?" questioned Annie Larkins.

"Oh, sing something that we all know," came from Jennie Mason. She, too, had seen Slugger and Nappy, but had refused to recognize them, remembering well the trouble she and Ida Brierley had had with the pair when all had gone out on the lake in a motor-boat, the particulars of which were given in the volume preceding this.

Soon the happy young folks were singing one familiar song after another and shouting and tooting the tin horns in great glee. In the meanwhile the turnout had left the vicinity of Haven Point, and was moving swiftly along in the direction of one of the neighboring towns.

"Oh, isn't this too lovely for anything!" exclaimed May, as one of the songs came to an end. "I never felt better in my life."

"If I felt any better, I'd have to call in the doctor," announced Andy with a sudden sober look on his face, and at this little sally all the girls giggled.

They were soon passing close to a stone wall, and from this some of the boys scooped handfuls of snow with which they began to pelt each other. Then they attempted to wash the faces of some of the girls, and a great commotion ensued.

"Hi you! be careful back there!" cautioned the

driver. "First thing you know, somebody will get pushed out."

"Oh, that will never happen!" cried Gif; but he had scarcely spoken when there came a wild yell from two of the cadets in the back of the box-sled, and the next moment Randy was seen to turn over and pitch out into the snow.

"Stop the sleigh! Stop the sleigh!" yelled Andy. "One man overboard, and no life-line handy!"

"Oh, dear! do you think he is hurt?" questioned May anxiously.

"He looks it!" answered her cousin. "Look out, or you'll get hit;" for scarcely had Randy landed in the snow than he picked himself up and began to make snowballs, which he sent after the sled in rapid succession. In the meantime, the driver had brought the turnout to a halt.

"Stop that, Randy," warned Jack. "You might hit some of the girls."

"No more such horseplay," announced Gif. "It's too dangerous, and, besides that, some of the girls might get hurt. You fellows have got to act like gentlemen. Ahem!" and Gif straightened himself up in imitation of Asa Lemm.

"Please, teacher, can't we act like ladies?" piped out Andy in a thin, effeminate voice.

"You'll remain after school for that, Rover,

and recite one hundred lines of Cæsar backward," commanded Gif.

"You bet your pink necktie, I'll be backward about reciting the hundred lines!" murmured the fun-loving boy.

The cadets had already arranged it between themselves to stop at a town about twelve miles away. There all hands trooped into a candy store to regale themselves with dainty sandwiches and hot chocolate. Some of the boys also obtained boxes of candy, and also some popcorn and peanuts, as well as apples, and these were passed around.

So far, Jack had had no opportunity to speak to Ruth in private, but while the others were still at the little tables in the rear of the candy shop, he motioned to her, and the pair walked toward the front.

"I want to ask you about the man we rescued in the woods, Ruth," he said. "Probably you know him. His name is Stevenson, although he said he was usually called Uncle Barney by all who knew him."

"Why, can that be possible!" exclaimed the girl in astonishment. "Uncle Barney Stevenson! Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"I'll tell you why," he answered. "I was afraid that possibly it might create some sort of scene.

By the way this Barney Stevenson acted, I knew there was something wrong between him and your folks. When I mentioned your father's name, he said he didn't want to hear anything about him—not a word!"

"Poor old man! I am so sorry for him;" and Ruth's manner showed that she spoke the truth.

"Why doesn't he want to hear from your father? But, excuse me, Ruth—maybe that is a private matter."

"I don't know that it is so very private, Jack. And, anyway, I'd like you to know the truth,—otherwise you might get a wrong impression—if you heard the story from outsiders. In a nutshell, the matter is this: Some years ago my father and his Uncle Barney were connected with a certain manufacturing company in which both held a considerable interest. The company went to pieces, and my father and Uncle Barney both lost their money. But my father had other interests which were distantly connected with this company, and in some manner poor old Uncle Barney, who was not much of a business man even though he was a lumberman, got it into his head that my father had, in some manner, gotten the best of him, because my father had money and he had not. Then, in the midst of this trouble, Uncle Barney's wife died. My father was away

in the West at the time with my mother, and could not get back in time for the funeral. This made Uncle Barney more bitter than ever, and he refused to listen to any explanations my folks might make. He had made some sort of deal to get possession of Snowshoe Island in Lake Monona, and he retired to the island and became almost a hermit."

"Yes, he told us he lived on the island, and he invited us to come over there, and he would show us some good hunting. I suppose it must be quite a place."

"My father has tried several times to patch up matters with old Uncle Barney, but he will not listen to any explanations. He is rather queer at times, and I suppose he has it strongly fixed in his mind that my father is in some manner responsible for his poverty, and that we think ourselves too high-toned to have anything to do with him, when, as a matter of fact, my folks would be very much pleased to have the old man become friends and live with them."

"Why doesn't your father send him a letter if he won't listen to his talk?"

"He has tried that. And mother has written old Uncle Barney some letters, too, during the last six or eight years. But he is very peculiar, and the letters come back unopened."

"And you really feel that you would like to be on good terms with him?"

"Yes, Jack. My folks would give a good deal to smooth the whole matter over. But, instead of becoming reconciled to the situation, old Uncle Barney apparently is becoming more bitter as time goes by."

"If you and your folks feel that way about it, I'd like very much to meet the old man again and have a talk with him. Of course, he told me that he never wanted to hear your father's name mentioned; but if I got a good chance I might be able to get him to open up and tell me his side of the story. And after he had done that, he might be more willing to listen to what I had to say."

"Oh, Jack! if you ever do get the chance, try to talk to him, by all means, and do what you can to impress it on his mind that my father had nothing to do with the loss of his money, and that my folks would have gone to Mrs. Stevenson's funeral had they been able to do so. And tell him, too, that my father and my mother, and also myself, would be very glad to become friends once more, and that our house will be open to him at any time."

The others of the sleighing party were now coming up, so there was no chance of saying anything further regarding the strange affair.

"Let's return to Haven Point by some other route," suggested Spouter.

"We'll have to ask the driver about the roads first," said Gif.

The driver had gone out to look after his horses. When questioned, he stated that they might return by a roundabout way through the village of Neckbury, but that it might take half an hour or so longer.

"Oh, I guess we've got time enough," said Fred, consulting his watch. "The girls haven't got to get back to Clearwater Hall until supper time, and we can get from one school to the other in a jiffy in the sleigh."

The liveryman was anxious to please the boys and girls, being desirous of getting more business from them in the future, and he readily agreed to take them home by the way of Neckbury, and he also agreed to get them back by the required time.

Once more all bundled into the turnout, and then, with a crack of the whip and a loud tooting of the horns, they started on the return.

"Another song now!" cried Andy, and commenced one of the ditties which at that time was popular at Colby Hall. In this the girls joined, most of them having heard it; and thus the crowd continued to enjoy themselves.

So far, they had met but few turnouts on the road, but now they found that the other route toward Haven Point was more popular, and they passed several farm sleds, and also a number of cutters, and even two automobiles, the latter ploughing along through the snow, using their heavy chains for that purpose.

They were soon mounting a small hill, and the driver allowed the horses to drop to a walk. From the top of the hill they could see for many miles around, with farms dotting one side of the roadway and the other sloping down gradually toward the distant lake.

"I'm afraid we're going to be a little late, after all," announced Gif, as he looked at his timepiece. "You'll have to shake it up a bit, old man," he added to the driver.

"Oh, I'll get you there in time—don't worry," was the ready reply, and then the driver cracked his whip and sent his horses down the other side of the hill at a good rate of speed.

About half way down the long hill there was a turn to the right. Here, on the outer edge of the road, was a gully which the wind of the day previous had partly filled with snow. Just before this bend was gained, those in the box-sled heard the toot of an automobile horn.

"Somebody coming up the hill," said Fatty

Hendry, who had resumed his seat beside the driver.

"Confound 'em! and I've got to take the outside of the turn," muttered the liveryman.

"Better be careful—it's none too wide along here," cautioned the fat youth.

The driver was already reining in his steeds, but the slope was considerable, and it was hard to hold them back. The box-sled struck the rear horses in the flanks, and away they went as fast as ever, crowding the horses in front and urging them onward also. Then the on-coming automobile hove in sight, and passed so closely that the driver of the box-sled had to pull still further over to the edge of the highway.

"Look out where you're going!" yelled Jack.

"I told you to be careful——" commenced Fatty, and then clutched at the high seat of the box-sled.

There was a wild scream of alarm and a general confusion among all the young people as the back end of the box-sled slewed around. One corner went down into the gully, and an instant later the box-sled stood up on its side, and girls and cadets went floundering forth into the snow.

CHAPTER IX

A MISHAP ON THE ROAD

"Gracious! where are we going?"

"Get off my head, Randy!"

"Say, Spouter, don't sit down on Ruth that way!"

"Hi! stop the horses, somebody!" screamed Fred, and then he leaped up and clung to the partly overturned box-sled, while Gif and another cadet did the same.

The driver had sensed the coming of the accident, and when the box-sled went over to one side, he had leaped to the other. Now he was standing in the snow with the reins still in his hands and doing his best to quiet the somewhat frightened steeds, which were plunging into each other in anything but an orderly fashion.

Down in the gully the girls and the cadets were having an exciting time of it. Some of the party had plunged almost head first into the snow.

"Come on, boys, help the girls all you can!" came from Jack, as he managed, though not with-

out considerable effort, to bring Ruth to her feet.

Fred and Randy were already assisting May to arise, and soon the other girls and boys were doing what they could to scramble through the deep snow toward the highway. Here there was a slippery slope of several feet.

Jack was the first boy up, and Randy came behind him. Then, while the two Rovers, assisted by Spouter, held fast to each other, they pulled up one girl after another. In the meanwhile, the other cadets made something of a chain, and soon all stood at the spot where the box-sled had overturned.

"All here?" queried Gif.

"I guess so," answered Spouter, knocking some snow from his cap.

The driver of the box-sled, assisted by several of the cadets, had managed to quiet the horses, some of which were inclined to bolt. The box-sled was all right, and the boys picked up what they could of the dry straw, and also shook out and replaced the robes.

"Oh, my, what a dreadful experience!" remarked Annie Larkins.

"Oh, I don't know that it was so very dreadful," returned Ruth. "No one was hurt."

"But we might have been," added Jennie Mason.

"Oh, I thought it was fun," laughed Ruth.

"It was the fault of that auto," grumbled the liveryman, thinking he had to defend himself. "He crowded me too close to the edge of the gully."

"That's just what he did!" cried Fatty. "The fellow who was driving that car ought to be arrested."

"Did you get his number, Fatty?" questioned Fred.

"Get his number? I didn't have time to get anything. He just slid by, and the next thing I knew, I was turning a somersault in the air and diving right down into the bottom of that hole;" and at this remark the other cadets had to smile.

The cadets assisted the girls back into the box-sled, and then they moved off once more, Jack and Gif both cautioning the driver to be careful.

Now that the danger was past, the young folks soon recovered from their scare, and then, to put all in a better humor, Andy started another school song, in which all joined lustily. Thus they soon rolled into town, and a little later came up to the entrance of the Clearwater grounds.

"I've had a prefectly splendid time, in spite of that little mishap," declared Ruth, as she bid Jack good-bye.

"We couldn't have had a nicer afternoon,"

said May. "You can come around with your box-sled just as often as you please;" and she smiled mischievously, in a way that set Fred's heart to bounding.

As it was growing late, the boys had scant time in which to bid the girls good-bye. Soon they were on the way to Colby Hall, and they told the driver to hurry as much as possible.

"If we're late and Asa Lemm finds it out, he'll certainly punish us in some way," was Randy's comment.

"Well, we're in luck for once," announced Gif. "I heard old Lemon say that he was going away right after lunch and wouldn't be back until to-morrow."

"It seems to me he has been spending quite some time away lately," remarked Spouter. "Not but what I'm perfectly willing that he should absent himself at every possible opportunity. The institution of learning can very well dispense with the services of such an individual as Professor Asa Lemm."

"A little long-winded, Spouter, but you hit the nail on the head," answered Fred. "Old Lemon could quit for good, and I doubt if any of us would shed a tear."

Although the cadets were half an hour late, neither Colonel Colby nor any of the professors

who saw them found any fault, and for this they were thankful.

As soon as he had an opportunity to do so, Jack told his cousins about what Ruth had said regarding old Barney Stevenson. They listened to his recital with keen interest.

"He certainly must be a queer stick," was Randy's comment. "Just the same, I'd like to go to Snowshoe Island and visit him."

"Yes, and try the hunting around that neighborhood," added Fred. "According to what that Bill Hobson said, Uncle Barney, as they call him, must be quite a hunter, as well as a lumberman."

"I'd like to have the chance to talk with him," resumed Jack. "From the way Ruth spoke, I'm quite sure her folks are very much put out over the way he is acting."

"I'll tell you what!" put in Andy, "we're going to have an extra long Christmas holiday, and we might get a chance to go over to Snowshoe Island hunting at that time."

"How do you know the holiday is going to be extra long?" queried Fred.

"I heard Professor Brice saying so. It seems they have got to fix some part of the heating plant, which is pretty well worn out, and the furnace man said it would take longer than at first expected. So, instead of closing up for ten days

or two weeks at Christmas, they are going to shut down for about three weeks."

"Three weeks! That will give us a nice holiday at home and give us a chance for an outing in the bargain," cried Jack.

Late that evening Slugger Brown and Nappy Martell put in an appearance and were closeted with Colonel Colby for the best part of half an hour. What was said by the master of Colby Hall the other cadets did not learn, but the two new arrivals looked exceedingly meek when they went up to their former rooms. On the following day they met the Rovers, but paid no attention whatever to them.

"Maybe they are going to give us the cold shoulder," remarked Fred.

"Well, that won't hurt me," answered Jack.

Several days went by, and the Rover boys applied themselves closely to their studies, realizing that before long the examinations previous to the Christmas holidays would take place. They did very well in their recitations, and got along nicely with all the professors except Asa Lemm.

"There is no use of talking—I can't get along with that man!" said Andy one afternoon. He was almost in despair. "If I hadn't just shut my mouth hard when old Lemon lectured me, there would have been an explosion, and I'd have

told him just exactly what I think of him—and it wouldn't have been anything that he would want to hear."

"Gif was telling me that Lemm is getting more and more anxious about some of that money he lost years ago."

"Maybe he thought he saw a chance of getting it back, and now it is slipping away from him again, and that is making him more sour than ever," suggested Randy.

"I don't care what is making him so sour—he needn't take it out of me," retorted his twin.

There had been another slight fall of snow, and on Thursday afternoon the cadets of Colby Hall organized a grand snowball match. A fort was built on the top of a little hill in the vicinity, and one crowd of cadets defended this, while the others made an attack. The school flag was hoisted over the fort, and the battle raged furiously for over an hour. Major Ralph Mason was in charge of the fort defenders, while the Rover boys, along with half of the school cadets, composed the attacking party. The fort was captured only after a terrific bombardment with snowballs, and it was Jack who had the pleasure of hauling down the flag.

"Some fight that!" remarked Fred, after the contest was over.

"Almost like a real battle," said Randy. "Just look at my left ear, will you?" and he pointed to that member, which was much swollen. "Got hit there twice—with regular soakers, too."

"Well, that's part of the game, Randy," remarked Jack. He had been hit half a dozen times, but had not minded it in the least.

On the following afternoon the Rover boys visited a long hill in that vicinity, which a number of the cadets were using for coasting purposes. With money sent to them by Jack's father, they had purchased a fine bobsled, and on this they took numerous rides, along with several of their chums.

There were two ways of going down the hill. One was in the direction of Haven Point, and the other wound around a second smaller hill and ended in the pasture lot of an old farmer. This farmer was an Irishman named Mike O'Toole, a pleasant enough individual, who had often given the boys rides on his farm wagon, and who was not averse to selling them fruit, and also milk, when they desired it. He was such a good-natured old man that very few of the cadets ever thought to molest his orchard.

"Say, I've got an idea!" cried Andy suddenly, when he and the other Rovers were riding down into O'Toole's pasture. "Let's go down and have

a look at the old man's goats," and he winked knowingly at his twin.

O'Toole had once lived in the city, and there had been the proud possessor of several goats, which he had used in one of the public parks, where they were attached to little wagons in which the children could ride for ten cents per person. O'Toole had brought his goats to the farm with him, and treated them with as much affection as if they were members of his family.

"What have you go up your sleeve, Andy?" questioned Fred, as they got off the bobsled and dragged it behind them toward Mike O'Toole's house. The old Irish farmer and his wife lived alone, having no children and no hired help.

"Oh, I thought we might hire a goat or two to pull the bobsled," was the easy answer.

"To pull the bobsled?"

"To be sure. If those goats can pull wagons, they can certainly pull sleds, too. Then, I thought if we could get the goats to pull us all the way to Colby Hall, it wouldn't be any more than fair to take the goats in out of the cold and treat 'em nicely."

"Oh, I see!" cried Randy, who was listening to his twin's talk. "For instance, we might take the goats into the Hall and up to Professor Lemm's room, eh?"

"You've caught the idea, Randy. What do you think of it?"

"Fine! Couldn't be better!" chuckled the other.

"What's this talk about taking O'Toole's goats to Colby Hall?" demanded Jack.

"Oh, we were thinking Professor Lemm would like to see the goats."

The oldest Rover boy looked stern for an instant, but then his mouth relaxed and he broke into a broad grin.

"Of course, we'll have to be careful how we get the goats into the Hall," he began.

"Hurrah! I knew it would hit you just right, Jack!" cried Andy, slapping his cousin on the shoulder. "Just you wait—we'll make old Lemon sit up and take notice this time!"

"But mum's the word—remember that," cautioned Randy. "If he ever caught us, well—good-night!"

CHAPTER X

SOMETHING ABOUT TWO GOATS

THE four Rover boys were almost up to Mike O'Toole's place when suddenly Jack caught Andy by the shoulder.

"Wait a minute!" he exclaimed.

"What's wrong now?" demanded the fun-loving youth.

"I've just been thinking, Andy. If we take those goats into the Hall and get into any kind of trouble, Professor Lemm will find it an easy matter to learn who got the goats from O'Toole."

"That's right, too!" broke in Fred, in dismay.

"Maybe we can get the goats on the sly," suggested Randy.

"I think that would be the better way to do it," answered Jack. "We can leave a note behind, stating that the goats will be returned, and we can also pay O'Toole something for using his animals."

The boys talked the matter over for several minutes, and then it was decided that Andy and

Randy should go ahead and reconnoitre. This they did, and were gone for about ten minutes.

"The coast is clear so far as we can see," announced Randy. "Mike O'Toole and his wife are both in the kitchen of the farmhouse preparing supper.

"And where are the goats?" questioned Fred quickly.

"He keeps them in a little shed off of his barn. Come on, I'll show you," returned Randy.

The other cadets followed him, and they soon reached the place he had mentioned. Here O'Toole kept six goats, and they were found finishing up some food he had evidently given them a short while before.

Two of the billy goats were quite large, one possessing a very fine pair of horns. This one, the boys knew, was called Patrick. The other large goat went by the name of Dan.

"Here is the harness," said Andy, bringing it from some pegs on which it was hanging. "We'll have to do the best we can about hitching 'em up."

While the others were doing this, Jack tore a page from a notebook he carried, and on this, in a large, disguised hand, he wrote the following:

"DEAR MR. O'TOOLE:

"We have taken the privilege of using two of your goats until to-morrow. They will be safely returned to you."

"I think we ought to pay him for the use of the animals," said Jack. "A little money will make him feel a great deal better."

"Let's pin two dollars to the note," suggested Fred, and this was done by Jack and the note placed where the Irish farmer would be sure to find it when he came again to tend to his animals.

It was an easy matter for the four boys to get the goats out of the shed, and then they led them to a spot behind some trees where the animals were hitched to the bobsled. Soon they started on the way to Colby Hall.

"Now that we've got possession of the goats, how do you fellows expect to work this stunt?" demanded Fred, as they brought the two goats down to a walk.

"I'll tell you one thing," declared Jack. "If you want to play this trick without the whole school knowing it, you had better reach Colby Hall by the lane that comes up behind the barn."

"Just what I was thinking of doing," answered Andy. "I thought maybe we could stable them

in that little toolhouse in the cornfield until we had a chance to get 'em into the Hall."

"That's the talk!" cried Randy. "Of course, we'll have to watch our chance, and not make a mess of it."

The two billy goats had often been harnessed together, so they got along quite amiably on the trip to the Military Academy. They were strong animals, and consequently the boys reached the field behind the barn in ample time to unhitch the goats and place them in the toolhouse that had been mentioned. Then they hurried around to the garage, where they were allowed to store their bobsled, and after that lost no time in getting ready for the evening parade and drill.

Directly after supper was over, the Rovers took Spouter, Gif and Fatty Hendry aside and told them of what was in the wind.

"Oh, say! that's great!" cried Fatty. "Let me have a hand in it, won't you?" He had had a quarrel with Asa Lemm a few days before, and was as sore as any of the other cadets.

"You ought to let us all have a hand in that, Andy," put in Spouter. "I believe every one of us feels the same way when it comes to old Lemon. He may have a vast amount of learning stored in his cranium, but his font of the milk of human kindness is completely dried up. Were

he to realize, or have the least conception——"

"Cut it, Spouter!" interposed Gif. "We agree with you—Asa Lemm is the lemon of all lemons, and I for one would like to teach him some kind of lesson."

The matter was talked over for some time, and, as a result, a number of other cadets, including Walt Baxter, Ned Lowe and Dan Soppinger, were let into the secret.

"Some of you will have to keep tab on Lemm while others see if the coast is clear during the time we are trying to get the goats upstairs," announced Randy.

"I don't think we'll have an easy time getting two animals to old Lemon's room," remarked Fred. "However, we'll get 'em up there somehow!"

Dan Soppinger was detailed to locate and watch Asa Lemm, and he soon came back and reported that the professor was sitting in a corner of the school library, making notes from several volumes.

"Well, you watch him, Dan," said Jack, "and if he starts to come upstairs, you let us know at once;" and to this Soppinger agreed.

After the supper hour, the cadets had their usual studying to do, and then came another hour for recreation previous to retiring.

"Now is our time," said Andy, as he threw aside his books and leaped to his feet. "Come on! Everybody on the job!"

The lads had already figured out how they expected to get the goats up to Asa Lemm's room. In the extreme rear of the school building was located an outside fire-escape leading from the third and second floors to the ground. At each floor there was a large doorway with a bolt on the inside. In order to induce the goats to mount the steps of the fire-escape, the boys had provided themselves with some vegetables purloined from the kitchen storeroom. Leaving the others to watch on the fire-escape and in the upper hallway of the school, the Rovers went out to the tool-house and released the two goats.

"Now then, Patrick and Dan, be good!" said Randy, patting the animals on the neck. And then he handed each of them a small carrot.

With more vegetables displayed close in front of them, the two billy goats mounted the fire-escape quite nimbly, being rewarded with something more to eat when they stood on the landing in front of the door leading into the upper hallway.

"Now if they only don't take it into their heads to let out a loud 'ba' when they get into the hall!" said Fred anxiously.

"We'll feed them something," returned Jack. "That will be sure to keep them quiet," and he passed over some bits of celery he had in his pocket.

A cautious rap on the iron door, and it was unbolted by Walt Baxter, who had been assigned to that duty.

"How about it—is the coast clear?" whispered Andy anxiously.

"I think so; but wait a minute and I'll make sure," whispered Walt in return.

Soon he came back with word from Fatty and Ned that the rear hall of the school was practically deserted. Ned had already tried several keys in the door to Asa Lemm's apartment, and unlocked it.

It was by sheer good luck that the boys managed unobserved to get the two goats into the school through two hallways and at last into the room of the hated professor.

On one side of the professor's bedroom there was a large clothing closet, and in this the two goats were placed.

"Now we'll take off their harness," said Jack. "There is no use in getting that snarled up or damaged."

"I'm going to fix up some new harness for them," announced Randy. "Come on, Andy."

His twin understood, and while the others remained on guard in the hallway, Randy and Andy lost no time in decorating the two goats with various articles of Professor Lemm's wearing apparel. They buttoned a coat around each goat like a blanket, and got a bright green sweater over one goat's head and around his neck. Then they found a number of used neckties in a chiffonier, and these were tied on the goat's legs and horns.

"They sure do look like some goats now!" cried Andy gaily. Then the animals were shoved back into the closet and the door closed.

"Is the coast still clear?" asked Randy, as they came out of the bedroom.

"It is. But I don't think Lemm will stay downstairs much longer," answered Jack.

"Will you fellows come down again? I've got another idea!" burst out Randy. "Come on—quick!"

Not knowing what was in the wind, the others followed him through the hallway and down the fire-escape once more. Then he led them to a place behind the garage. Here were a number of flat boxes, which, in the springtime, had been used for raising plants. These boxes had had a small amount of water in them, and were now filled with thin sheets of ice.

"Let's take a few of those sheets of ice upstairs," said Randy. "They'll fit in very nicely between the sheets on old Lemon's bed."

All of the others caught at the suggestion with avidity, and in a very few minutes each of the boys was mounting the fire-escape once again, this time with a large sheet of ice, not unlike a heavy pane of glass, under his arm.

"I've got a scheme," suggested Andy, with a broad grin. "We'll place three of the sheets of ice in his bed under the sheet, and the others on the floor here right in front of the door. Then he'll have a chance to slide into the room."

"Wow! and maybe it won't be some slide!" chuckled Walt Baxter.

The sheets of ice were soon placed in the bed and covered with some of the bedspreads, and the others were disposed on the hardwood floor directly in front of the door inside the room. Then the cadets turned out the lights, locked the door as before, and hurried away.

It was less than five minutes later when Dan Soppinger came rushing upstairs, whistling in a peculiar manner. This was a signal that danger was at hand.

"He just put the books away, and he's gathering up his papers," announced Dan. "I think he'll be upstairs in a few minutes more."

"All right, Dan, we're ready for him," announced Randy. "Now then, fellows, if there isn't some fun when Asa Lemm enters his room, then I miss my guess."

The joke that was to come off seemed to be too good to keep, and as a consequence, after a hurried consultation, about a dozen other cadets were let into the secret. All watched eagerly for the coming of Professor Lemm, and there was a low whistle of warning went from room to room when the hated teacher was seen to be mounting the stairs.

As was quite usual with him, Asa Lemm was not in good humor. He had been hunting up a number of references in the library without his usual success.

"This job of teaching is getting worse and worse," he grumbled to himself. "It's too bad that I've got to waste my time on these boys. If I could only get back some of that money I lost, I wouldn't spend another hour over this tiresome task," and he heaved a deep sigh. The loss of his little fortune was the one great sore spot with him.

He came swinging through the hall with long, rapid strides, and as he did so the Rovers and their friends watched him from various doorways and side halls. They saw him unlock his door

and throw it open. The next instant came a sudden yell of alarm, and then a tremendous bump. Asa Lemm's feet had struck the sheets of ice on the floor, and they had gone out from under him very suddenly, letting him down flat on his back.

"Hi! hi! what's the meaning of this?" spluttered the teacher; and then, as his hand struck the icy coldness of what was beneath him, he gave another cry. "Ice! What does this mean? Can the water pipes have burst and flooded the room?"

Not without difficulty he managed to regain his feet, and then started to walk to where he could turn on the lights. But again he slipped, and this time he came up against a small table piled high with books and sent this over with a crash.

"Gee! he's sure enjoying himself!" chuckled Andy.

"Come on, fellows, let's see what all the noise is about!" exclaimed Jack in a loud voice. "Something dreadful must be going on in Professor Lemm's room."

"What's the matter—is somebody getting killed?" called out Randy.

"It isn't a fire, is it?" broke in Walt Baxter, catching the cue.

"Sounds to me as if somebody was pulling the school down," was Spouter's contribution.

"Everybody to the rescue!" yelled Ned Lowe.

These cries, combined with the noise which was coming from Asa Lemm's apartment, caused such a commotion that soon fully a score of other cadets showed themselves in the hallway.

"What's the matter?" questioned Slugger Brown, who had just been on the point of retiring, and who was in his pajamas and slippers.

"Something going on in Professor Lemm's room," answered Nappy Martell, who had been with him, and who was similarly attired.

By this time Professor Lemm had managed to regain his feet a second time, but the broken sheets of ice were now all over the floor of his room, and just as he managed to turn on the lights he slipped once more, this time sending a chair spinning against the closet door.

"It's ice—it's ice, and nothing else!" he ejaculated, as he gazed in wonder at the floor. "Now, how did that come here? I don't see any broken water pipe." Then, of a sudden, his face took on a dark look. "It's those boys—confound them! If I can catch them, I'll make them suffer for this!"

CHAPTER XI

THE JOKE ON ASA LEMM

"Let's go in and see what's the matter with the poor man," suggested Andy.

"That's right—maybe he's got a fit."

"Something has happened to Professor Lemm!" yelled one of the other cadets.

By this time the commotion had attracted the attention of nearly everybody in the school, and teachers and cadets came running from all directions, and even some of the hired help from the kitchen came up the back stairs, wondering what had gone wrong. Then the bunch of boys, led by the Rovers, suddenly threw open the door which led to Asa Lemm's room. It was at this instant that the astonished and bewildered professor was making his way toward the closet door. A strange thumping had reached his ears.

"I knew it—it's some of those boys, and more than likely one of them got locked into the closet by his fellows. I'll soon find out who he is and

THE GOAT CAME FULL TILT INTO SLUGGER BROWN.

make him tell me who is responsible for this outrage!"

The door had been locked by Randy, but the key was in it, and readily turned. Then Professor Lemm flung the door open viciously.

"You rascals, I'll teach you to play tricks on me!" he began, as in the somewhat dim light he made out what he thought were the forms of two crouching boys. Then he let out a sudden yell of alarm as one of the crouching figures launched itself forward at him. The figure was that of Patrick, the larger of the goats.

Bewildered by the confinement, and not at all liking the way in which he had been dressed up, the big billy goat hurled himself straight at the teacher. He struck Asa Lemm fairly and squarely in the stomach, bowling him over as if he were a tenpin. Then he made another leap, and landed on the top of the bed, where he gazed around, not knowing which way to turn next.

"Oh my! look at what Professor Lemm has in his room!" piped up Andy.

Asa Lemm had rolled over and was now trying to get up, but just as he raised himself on his hands and knees, he struck some of the sliding sheets of ice, and down he went once more, this time directly in front of the other goat, which promptly proceeded to leap on top of him.

"Hi! get off of me, you rascal!" spluttered the professor, and thrashed around wildly. "Get off of me! Who are you, anyway?" and then, as he got a better sight of the animal, which at that moment leaped up on the bed beside his mate, he turned and sat up in amazement.

"A goat! Two goats! How did they get here?"

"What do you know about this? Professor Lemm is keeping goats in his room!" cried Jack.

These and a score of other cries rent the air, while all the cadets crowded into the doorway of the room to see what was going on. In the bunch of boys were Slugger Brown and Nappy Martell, and it must be confessed that these two unworthies were enjoying the scene quite as much as anybody.

"I'll fix some of you for this!" roared Asa Lemm, as he struggled to his feet, slipping around and clutching the end of his bed as he did so. "I'll have some of you suspended! Where is Colonel Colby? Send for Colonel Colby at once!"

Evidently Patrick, the larger goat, did not like the looks of the irate teacher, who was now shaking his fists at the grinning cadets. Suddenly the goat made another leap, this time striking Asa Lemm in the shoulder, and once more the pro-

fessor went down, this time with his feet sliding directly under the bed, so that he became somewhat wedged in from his waist down. Then the goat made another leap and charged toward the door to the hallway.

"Look out!" warned Jack, and was just in time to push Fred out of danger. Then the goat made a rush, and the next minute came full tilt into Slugger Brown, sending the bully crashing into those behind him. The second goat also leaped from the bed, and made for the doorway, hitting Martell as he passed.

"Look out for the battering-ram!"

"This is only a battering goat—but it's just as bad!" yelled Andy. Go it, goat! Go it!" he added gleefully.

Both goats did "go it." They raced through the hallway, knocking down cadets right and left. One younger boy, named Stowell, but who was always called Codfish by the others because of his unusually broad mouth, was attacked at the head of the stairs and sent hurtling down to the bottom.

"Oh! oh! I'm killed! He has knocked me to pieces!" yelled Codfish.

With the two goats racing around the school, the excitement increased. But gradually the goats were driven by the Rovers to a lower hallway,

and then toward a side door, which Jack and Fred lost no time in opening.

"Get them out of here as quick as you can. We don't want them to be captured," whispered Jack to his cousins. "We don't want old Lemon to know they are Mike O'Toole's animals."

"Stop those goats! I don't want them to get away!" yelled Asa Lemm, from the upper hallway. But the goats were already outside.

"Oh gee! we forgot one thing—I mean several things!" gasped Andy. "The goats are dressed up in old Lemon's clothes!"

"Gracious! why didn't we think of that?" gasped Randy. "We can't let 'em run away with all that stuff!"

"I'll go after them and see if I can stop them," said Jack.

"Want me to go with you?" questioned Walt.

"If you will, Walt. Maybe it will take two of us to manage the goats." And then Jack and Walt hurried off and the others returned to see what would happen next.

Fortunately for the boys who had gone after them, the goats did not run very far. Jack had a few more vegetables left in his pocket, and with these in his hand he walked cautiously up to the animals, which had run down to a corner of the campus.

"Hurrah! I've got one of them!" cried the Rover boy presently, as he caught Patrick by the horns. "Now, Walt, see if you can hold the other, and we'll take these things off of them."

Now that they were once more in the open air, the goats appeared to be quite docile, and consequently the two cadets had little difficulty in disrobing them.

"Why don't you return the goats to O'Toole while you are at it?" suggested Walt, after the wearing apparel had been placed in a small bundle.

"I'd do it if I had their harness, Walt."

"Want me to go back for it?"

"If you will."

"All right, I'll do it. And give me that bundle. I'll smuggle it into the school somehow and watch my chance to leave it in old Lemon's room." Evidently the son of Dan Baxter was as bold as his father had ever been before him.

So it was arranged, and a minute later Walt disappeared into the school building. He was gone the best part of five minutes, and then came running across the school campus, carrying the goats' harness under his sweater.

"Gee, but they are having a peach of a time in the school," he announced. "Asa Lemm is quarreling with Colonel Colby, who came over

from his rooms. He wants to have half the school arrested on account of the goats and the ice."

"What did you do with the bundle?"

"Oh, say—that was easy! All the crowd were around old Lemon and the colonel discussing the matter, so I slipped behind them and threw the bundle in the corner of Lemon's room."

The two Rovers lost no time in placing a little of the harness on the goats—just sufficient to drive them.

"Now, you needn't go with me, Walt, unless you want to. I can get these goats to O'Toole's alone."

"Oh, I'd just as lief keep you company," answered the other cheerfully.

Urging the two goats before them, the pair made off down the hill in the direction of the O'Toole farm. The animals seemed to know the way home, and kept up a brisk pace.

"Now then, we had better go a bit slow," announced Jack, when they came in sight of the buildings. "Maybe O'Toole has discovered the absence of the goats, and is on the watch for us."

This warning, however, was unnecessary, for the old Irish farmer and his wife had retired for the night, doing this without being aware of what had taken place among their live stock.

Cautiously the two cadets opened the goat stable and led the animals inside. Then, while Walt lit a couple of matches, Jack managed to place the goats where they had been before, and also put the harness away.

"I don't think I'll leave that note, or the money either," he said. "Maybe it will be as well if O'Toole never knows that the goats were out. I don't think the experience did them any harm. If it did, we can settle with O'Toole later;" and he pocketed the note he had previously written, and also the money. Then the two cadets lost no time in hurrying back to Colby Hall.

In the meantime, what Walt had said about the commotion going on at the school was true.

"I tell you, sir, it's a perfect outrage!" bawled Asa Lemm at the top of his lungs. "An outrage, sir, and I demand satisfaction!"

"Please do not become so excited, Professor," responded Colonel Colby. "We must try to get at the bottom of this matter. You say there is ice on the floor of your room?"

"Yes, sir; a perfect pond of ice!"

"Did somebody flood your floor and then freeze it?" questioned the master of the Hall in wonder.

"I don't know how it was done. But it was done, and I nearly broke my neck the minute I

entered the room. It was disgraceful! I never saw anything to equal it!" and Asa Lemm's face was fairly purple with rage.

"And what about those goats?"

"They were locked up in my closet and dressed up in some clothing—my clothing, I suppose."

"Then, when they ran out of the building, they must have taken your clothing with them."

"More than likely. Oh, it's shameful!" and the irate professor shook his fists in his rage.

"Where are the goats now?"

"I don't know, and I don't care."

"One of those goats knocked me flat," growled Slugger Brown.

"Yes, and he biffed me one, too," came from Nappy Martell.

"Let us go and make an investigation, Professor Lemm," remarked Colonel Colby. "I will accompany you to your room," for they were now near the stairway which the goats had descended.

The pair proceeded to the apartment, followed by some of the other teachers and nearly all of the cadets. By this time much of the ice on the floor had melted, forming little pools of muddy water.

"We had better have this cleaned up at once," said Colonel Colby, and turned to one of the teachers. "Order some of the hired help up here,

please;" and the teacher hurried off to execute the errand.

While Colonel Colby was looking at the ice and the water, Asa Lemm chanced to glance in a corner. Then he strode forward and caught up the bundle Walt Baxter had flung there.

"What is that?" questioned the master of the Hall. And then, as the professor undid the bundle, he continued: "Is that your clothing?"

"I—I think it is," faltered Asa Lemm. "Yes, sir."

"Did they undress the animals before they let them go?" queried the master of the school, and, if the truth must be told, he had all he could do to keep a straight face. He could not help but remember some of the pranks he had played himself while a cadet at Putnam Hall.

"I don't know anything about this, Colonel Colby. But these are my things," and, catching up the bundle, Asa Lemm flung it into the clothing closet. He continued to storm around, demanding that some of the boys be punished for what had occurred. While this was going on, two of the hired help came up from the kitchen with pails and mops, and presently succeeded in cleaning up the floor. Two rugs which had been lying there were taken away to be dried.

"I think we had better let this matter rest until

morning," said Colonel Colby finally. "It is too late to start an investigation now. I wish all of you to retire at once," he commanded, to the amused cadets.

"Some one is going to suffer for this," growled Asa Lemm.

"I shall do what I can for you, Professor," announced the master of the Hall, and then he moved away, scattering the cadets before him.

Most of the boys retired to their rooms smiling broadly to themselves, for nearly all of them had enjoyed the joke greatly.

"But it isn't over yet," whispered Andy to his immediate friends. "There is more to come. Just watch and see!"

CHAPTER XII

IN COLONEL COLBY'S OFFICE

As soon as Jack and Walt returned to Colby Hall, they hurried up to the rooms occupied by the Rover boys. They found Jack's cousins present, and also Gif, Spouter and several others.

"We had the best luck ever!" declared Jack, and related how they had managed to get the goats back to Mike O'Toole's stable without the Irish farmer being aware of what had happened.

"Say, that's fine!" burst out Andy.

"We want to be on the watch," remarked Randy. "Old Lemon will be going to bed pretty soon, and we want to find out just how comfortable he finds his bed," and he grinned.

Word had been passed around to about a dozen of the cadets, and as soon as the school had quieted down and the others had retired to their rooms, these cadets came forth into the halls on tiptoes and made their way noiselessly in the direction of the apartment occupied by Asa Lemm.

"He's arranging that clothing in his closet," announced Andy, after peering through the keyhole in the door. "He's partly undressed, so I guess he'll go to bed pretty soon."

There was a short silence, and then the boys heard the bed creak as Professor Lemm got into it. An instant later came a cry of rage.

"What's this? More ice, I declare! The bed is sopping wet! Oh, those young rascals!" for Asa Lemm had thrown himself down beneath the spread under which had been placed several sheets of thin ice. A large portion of the ice had melted, and the sheets were as wet as they were cold. As a consequence, his pajamas were pretty well soaked, and he shivered as he threw the covers back and bounced to his feet.

"He's enjoying it all right enough," whispered Andy.

"Hang those boys!" roared the irate teacher. "Oh, what I wouldn't do to them if I had them here!" He hopped around the room first on one foot and then on the other, shivering as he did so. As was usual, the steam throughout the building had been turned off some time before, so that the apartment was quite cold.

"We had better scatter," warned Jack. "He may open the door at any instant and find us here."

"Right you are!" answered Randy, and then, unable to resist the temptation, he bent down and shouted through the keyhole: "Pleasant dreams, Professor! I hope you enjoyed the ice-water!"

Then all of the cadets fled to their rooms, and in less than five minutes each of them was undressed and safe in bed.

If ever there was an angry man, it was Asa Lemm at that particular moment. He had to change all his night clothing, and then don a bathrobe and slippers and go down below once more and get some of the hired help to clean up his room and take away the wet mattress of his bed. A dry mattress was substituted from a vacant bedroom, but it was all of half an hour before this work was accomplished; and in the meantime the professor stormed around, threatening about everything he could imagine.

"I'll have the law on them! I'll have every one of them locked up!" he said to Colonel Colby. "It's an outrage that I should be treated in this fashion."

"It is certainly a most unpleasant occurrence, Professor," agreed the master of the Hall. "But boys will be boys—you know that as well as I do. I can remember when I went to school, I loved to play practical jokes, and they were not always kindly jokes, either. But as for having

these boys arrested, or anything of that sort, that, I think, would be going too far. We can punish them enough right here—that is, provided we can find out who they are."

"I don't believe in such jokes!"

"Neither do I—now that I have grown older. But I did believe in them when I was a boy."

"The trouble with this school is, the discipline is not strict enough," snapped Asa Lemm. "If we are not more strict, the cadets will degenerate into nothing but rowdies and hoodlums."

"I think I am the best judge of how discipline should be maintained in this institution," responded Colonel Colby, with dignity. "I will take this matter up in the morning and do my best to sift it to the bottom. Now I think we had better retire, as it is growing late," and thereupon he returned to his own rooms.

"I think that was the best joke we ever played," remarked Andy, when he and the other Rovers were dressing on the following morning.

"It sure did count one against old Lemon," chuckled Randy.

"Yes. And to think the way Slugger and Nappy were knocked over by the goats too!" broke in Fred.

"I'll bet they're mad over that," observed Jack. "More than likely, it will make them take a hand

in assisting Lemm to find out who was guilty. We'll have to be on our guard against them."

"Did anybody see you making off with the goats?" queried Randy suddenly.

"I don't think so," answered Jack. But in this surmise he was mistaken; one cadet had seen Walt Baxter hurrying from the school with goats' harness under his sweater, and this youth had, from a safe distance, watched Jack and Walt place some of the harness on the goats and drive them off in the direction of Mike O'Toole's farm.

This cadet was Codfish, who was always sneaking around, trying to pick up information that did not rightly belong to him.

"Ha, ha!" said the little sneak to himself, after Walt and Jack had disappeared. "Now I know who was responsible for bringing those goats into the school."

At first the sneak thought he would report the matter to either Asa Lemm or Colonel Colby, but as he was not in particularly good favor with the professor on whom the joke had been played, he thought it might be as well for him to wait and think the matter over.

"Maybe I had better tell Slugger and Nappy first and see what they've got to say about it," he reasoned. He went to the bully and his crony with everything.

He dressed early, and then went over to Nappy's room, where he found the cronies together, just as he had surmised. They were talking over the affair of the night before and wondering who could be guilty.

"I've got some news," announced Codfish.

"What news?" demanded Nappy.

"It's very important," went on the little cadet. "If I tell you will you promise not to give me away?"

"Is it about last night's affair, Cod?" demanded Slugger quickly.

"Now look here, Slugger! You promised not to call me Cod any more," pleaded the sneak.

"All right, Henry. That was merely a slip of the tongue," returned the bully good-naturedly. He knew exactly how to handle such a fellow as Stowell. "Now tell us what you've got on your mind."

"Will you promise not to give me away?"

"Sure!" came from both of the others promptly.

"Well then, I know who brought those two goats into the school last night," announced Codfish proudly; and thereupon, being urged to do so by the others, he told of what he had seen.

"I knew the Rovers were mixed up in that!" cried Slugger.

"And I've noticed that Walt Baxter has been training with them. More than likely it was the work of the whole Rover crowd," announced Nappy.

"Don't you think we ought to let Colonel Colby know about this?" questioned Codfish anxiously. It was his delight to get other cadets into trouble and see them suffer, but he always wanted to keep his own actions dark for fear his schoolmates might turn on him and start in to "square up."

"Of course we ought to let Colonel Colby know about this—and Professor Lemm too," answered Nappy. "The question is, how can we do it without getting mixed up in it ourselves?"

"We might send a note to Colonel Colby," suggested the sneak.

The matter was talked over for several minutes, and then it was decided that two notes should be written and one delivered to Colonel Colby and the other to Asa Lemm.

"Who is going to write the notes?" questioned Codfish.

"You can do that, Henry," said the bully quickly. He had not forgotten how the anonymous letter he had once sent out had been traced back to him, in spite of the disguised handwriting.

"Oh, I couldn't do that!" answered Stowell in alarm. And he shook his head vigorously.

"Yes, you can!" broke in Nappy. And thereupon, somewhat against his will, Codfish penned the two notes in as much of a disguised hand as was possible for him.

"But I'm not going to deliver the notes," he warned feebly. "You two have got to do that much."

"All right, we will," answered Slugger. He turned to his crony. "You slip one of them under Professor Lemm's door, and I'll place the other on Colonel Colby's desk."

"All right, but be careful."

"Bet your life!"

Asa Lemm was just finishing his morning toilet and grumbling over the happenings of the night, when he chanced to glance toward the door of his room, and at that moment saw a letter thrust under it. He stared for an instant in amazement, and then rushed forward and threw the door wide open. But his movement, quick as it was, came too late, for Nappy Martell had already slipped around a corner and made his escape. Taking up the letter, the professor read the contents with great interest. The communication ran as follows:

"DEAR PROFESSOR LEMM:

"If you want to know more about the trouble last night, ask John Rover and Walter Baxter. They had the two billy goats. I think you will find that all of the Rovers and the boys who go with them were in this joke.

"Yours respectfully,

"One Who Knows."

"So that's who is guilty!" muttered the teacher, after reading the letter a second time. "The Rovers, eh? I might have known it because of the trouble I have had with them in the classroom. And I remember now that I have also had trouble with that Baxter boy. I must see Colonel Colby about this at once."

The professor hurried downstairs, and found that Colonel Colby had entered his office but a few minutes before, and was perusing the communication left there secretly by Slugger Brown.

"I have found out who was guilty last night," snapped Asa Lemm, as he flourished the letter in his hand.

"Did you receive an anonymous communication?" demanded the master of the Hall.

"I did, sir. But what makes you ask that question?"

"I have such a communication myself," and Colonel Colby indicated the epistle.

"We must punish those rascals, sir!"

"First I want to find out if there is any truth in these letters," answered Colonel Colby. "Very frequently anonymous communications cannot be relied upon."

"Oh, I haven't the least doubt but what Rover and Baxter are guilty!" exclaimed Asa Lemm quickly. "I've had trouble in the classroom with them, and also with the other Rovers. I should not be surprised if the whole crowd had something to do with it."

"I will send for Rover and Baxter."

It must be confessed that Jack was somewhat surprised when one of the assistants came to him and told him he was wanted immediately in the office.

"Gee! this looks bad!" cried Randy.

"Want any of us to go with you?" questioned Fred quickly.

"No; I can face the music alone," answered the oldest Rover boy.

He arrived at the office just as another assistant was bringing in Walt Baxter. The two exchanged glances, but said nothing. But the glance given Walt meant, "Keep mum," and the other understood and nodded slightly.

"So here you are, eh?" cried Asa Lemm, before Colonel Colby had a chance to say a word. "I thought I'd catch you!"

"Excuse me, Professor Lemm, but I wish you would allow me to conduct this examination," put in Colonel Colby a trifle stiffly. If the truth must be told, the overbearing manner of the teacher was not any more to the liking of the master of the Hall than it was to the cadets. Yet, Asa Lemm had come well recommended, and Colonel Colby did not wish to pass hasty judgment on him.

"Yes, sir," returned the professor. "But please remember I have suffered greatly, and I demand satisfaction."

"I have sent for you cadets in order to clear up the affair that happened last night," began Colonel Colby, ignoring Asa Lemm's last remark. "I have been given to understand that you were the two to bring those goats into the Hall. Am I right?"

"I did not bring the goats into the Hall," returned Walt Baxter promptly. "Just the same, I guess I'm as guilty as anybody," he added quickly, not wishing to shirk responsibility.

"I was one of the cadets who brought the goats into the Hall, Colonel Colby," answered Jack promptly.

"Baxter did not assist in bringing them into the Hall?"

"No, sir."

"But you were not alone, Rover?"

"No, sir."

"Who was with you in this escapade?"

"I prefer not to answer that question, Colonel Colby."

"Make him answer! Make him answer!" stormed Asa Lemm. "You young rascal! I'll teach you to play tricks on me!" and he shook his fist in Jack's face.

"Professor Lemm, I'll thank you to be less violent," interrupted Colonel Colby. "This examination must be held in an orderly fashion. You say you were not alone, Rover. Will you tell me how many were mixed up in this affair?"

Jack thought for a moment. "Do you mean the whole happening in Professor Lemm's room?"

"Yes."

"Oh, there were eight or ten of us—maybe more. Of course, some had more to do with it than others," responded Jack.

"Eight or ten of you!" gasped Asa Lemm. "As many as that?" And his face showed his surprise. He had imagined that possibly only the Rover boys and Walt Baxter were guilty.

"Are you quite sure you don't want to mention any names, Rover?" asked Colonel Colby again.

"No, Colonel. And if you were in my position, I do not think you would want to mention any of them either," added Jack, looking the master of the Hall squarely in the eyes.

"We won't discuss that side of the question." Colonel Colby turned to Walt Baxter. "How about you? Do you care to say who was mixed up in this affair?"

"No, sir," was the prompt response.

"Make them tell! Make them tell!" exclaimed Asa Lemm. "Punish them severely! Put them in the guardhouse on bread and water until they are willing to divulge the names of all the rascals who were mixed up in these outrageous proceedings."

"I am not going to make them tell if they won't do it on their own account," was Colonel Colby's answer. As a cadet at Putnam Hall, he had never had any use for a tale bearer.

"Then I'll take the law in my own hands!" cried Asa Lemm vindictively. "I'll go down to Haven Point and make a complaint and have them both arrested!"

CHAPTER XIII

ASA LEMM IS DISMISSED

WHILE the examination of Jack and Walt was taking place in the office, the other Rovers and their chums held a meeting in Randy's room.

"What do you suppose this means—calling Jack and Walt down to the colonel's office?" remarked Fred anxiously. He had just been informed by Dan Soppinger about Walt.

"It was Jack and Walt who took those goats back. Maybe somebody spotted them," suggested Spouter.

The discussion lasted for some minutes and grew quite warm, and then Andy leaped up.

"I know what I'm going to do!" he said. "I'm going below and try to find out just what it means."

"And so am I," added Fred and Randy quickly.

"We'll all stand by him," announced Spouter. "Of course, you fellows brought the goats here, but I think we had as much to do with the rest of it as any of you."

Andy hurried off, and lost no time in making his way to the door of Colonel Colby's private office. The door had been left slightly ajar, so it was an easy matter for him to take in most of what was said.

"Gracious! this certainly is growing serious," he murmured to himself, when Asa Lemm made the declaration that he would go down to Haven Point and have Jack and Walt arrested. "I guess I had better let the others know about it," and he scurried upstairs again.

"Oh, Andy! do you suppose old Lemon will really have them locked up?" questioned Fred anxiously, after being told of what was taking place below.

"I don't think he would dare to do it," announced Spouter.

"I move we all go down and take a hand in this!" cried Gif. "There is no fairness in letting Jack and Walt suffer for what we did."

Several other cadets had drifted in, those who had either been on the watch while the joke was being prepared or who had assisted in placing the sheets of ice on the floor and in the bed, and all agreed that the crowd had better stand together when it came to acknowledging what had been done.

"Forward march!" cried Gif, who, as a leader

in athletics, took it upon himself to manage the affair. "Come on now—and no shirking!"

Braced up by numbers, all of the cadets fell in readily with this plan, and as a consequence there were ten boys led by Gif and the Rovers who marched down to the office.

"We'll enter by column of twos," announced Gif. "March in in regular military fashion," he added, and then knocked upon the office door.

Colonel Colby was doing what he could to question Jack and Walt on one hand, while trying to make Asa Lemm keep quiet on the other, when the others arrived. The master of the Hall was having no easy time of it, because Professor Lemm seemed to be growing more and more excited.

"I'll have the law on them, I tell you!" he cried. "They ought to go to state's prison for this!"

"Please be quiet just a minute, Professor," remonstrated Colonel Colby. Then came the knock on the door, and the colonel flung it open, not at all pleased over the interruption.

"Wha—what does this mean?" gasped Asa Lemm, as he saw the double row of cadets filing in.

"Colonel Colby, we have come to report," announced Gif, saluting.

"Please allow me to be the spokesman, Gif," pleaded Randy, stepping to the front. And then, before his school chum could speak, he continued: "Colonel Colby, we have come to give ourselves up."

"Give yourselves up! What do you mean, Rover?"

"We were all in this lark together, sir."

"And if there is to be any punishment we want to stand for our share of it," added Andy.

"I think we Rover boys were more to blame than the others," put in Fred.

"You see, Professor Lemm is down on us, and we thought we had to do something to get square," Andy endeavored to explain.

"He doesn't treat us fairly in the classroom!" cried Spouter.

"If he wasn't here we'd get along without any trouble whatever," piped up a voice in the rear.

It must be confessed that the sudden entrance of the ten cadets, and what they had to say concerning the joke that had been played, somewhat stumped the master of the Hall. As for Asa Lemm, for the moment he was dumbfounded; but then his natural antipathy to boys asserted itself, and he glared at them viciously.

"So you were all in it, eh?" he snarled. "I might have known as much. You are all a pack

of rowdies! You are not fit to associate with respectable people!"

"Professor Lemm, I do not wish you to address our cadets in such a manner," said Colonel Colby sternly. "These young gentlemen are not rowdies, even though they have played a joke which was not particularly nice. I do not uphold them in the least in what they have done, but, at the same time, I cannot help but remember that they are only boys, and that boys are sometimes very thoughtless."

"Thoughtless! They think too much! I tell you, sir, they are a pack of rowdies, and unless you punish them, and punish them severely, I shall take the matter in my own hands and have them arrested."

"If you do anything of that sort, Professor Lemm, we will have to dispense with your services in this school," announced Colonel Colby flatly. He was growing weary of the irate teacher's manner.

A strenuous half hour followed, everybody present forgetting all about roll call and breakfast. Colonel Colby did what he could in questioning all of the cadets regarding the occurrences of the night before, but was continually interrupted by the unreasonable teacher. Finally he could stand it no longer, and turned to the pro-

fessor with all the dignity he could command.

"Professor Lemm, I have stood enough," he said in a cold, hard voice, which instantly commanded attention. "I want no more such language from you. You may go to your breakfast, and I will conduct this examination alone, and will see you about it before we begin the day's session in the school. And, in the meantime, allow me to impress upon you that it is all nonsense to talk about having any of these boys arrested. They have done nothing that warrants arrest, and if you attempt anything of that sort, you will not only make yourself ridiculous, but you might place yourself open to a suit for damages. Now, please leave this office."

"I'll see about this! I'll see about this!" snapped the unreasonable teacher, and left the office in anything but a dignified fashion.

As soon as Professor Lemm had gone, the master of the Hall questioned the boys closely concerning, not only the affair of the night before, but also about the troubles they had had with the teacher, both in the classroom and elsewhere. This was the first time the boys had had a chance to "get one in on old Lemon," as Andy afterwards declared, and they did not mince matters in telling of the many trials and tribulations which Asa Lemm had caused them. It is barely

possible that some of the complaints were overdrawn, yet there was such a unanimity of opinion concerning Professor Lemm's harshness that Colonel Colby was quite impressed.

"Now I want to ask you boys a question, and I want you to answer it honestly," said Colonel Colby toward the close of the examination. "Would you have played such a trick as this upon any of the other professors?"

"I wouldn't," answered Randy quickly.

"Nor I," came from Fred and Andy.

"I'd never dream of playing such a trick on anybody but a man like Professor Lemm," announced Jack. The others also agreed that it was not likely any such joke would have been played on anybody else in the Hall.

"Then, evidently, none of you likes Professor Lemm," said Colonel Colby slowly.

To this there was no reply, but the look on the faces of the various cadets showed the master of the Hall that he had struck the truth.

"Now I'm going to ask you boys another question," he went on, after a pause, and there was a faint smile on his face when he spoke. "Don't you think you ought to be punished for what you have done?"

For a moment there was another silence. Then Jack spoke up.

"In one way, yes, sir; but in another, no," he replied. "Professor Lemm treated us very unjustly in the classroom in making us stay in and making us do extra lessons, and we didn't know of any other way to get square with him."

"Looks to me as if we got our punishment before we played the joke," said Andy, and this reply made some of the cadets grin.

Colonel Colby looked out of the window, which faced the snow-covered campus. Although the boys did not know it, he hardly knew what to say or do. He realized that he could not pass over the occurrence without punishing the lads, and yet he could see their point of view—that Asa Lemm had been the first at fault in not treating them fairly during classes.

"Order has got to be maintained in this school," he said finally, as he faced them. "If we did not have order, the whole institution would go to pieces. That is my first point. My second is that two Wrongs have never yet made a Right, and instead of taking matters into your own hands, as you did, after having trouble with Professor Lemm, you should have come to me and told me what was wrong.

"I shall take this matter up later, after I have had an opportunity to make further inquiries concerning your conduct. In the meantime, you may

go to breakfast, and then to your classes;" and thus he dismissed them.

Of course, as soon as the boys were by themselves, they began to discuss the situation from every possible angle. Several wanted to know how it was that the master of the Hall had learned that Jack and Walt were guilty.

"Somebody sent Colonel Colby a note about us. I saw it on his desk," answered Jack.

"Yes, and Asa Lemm had another note just like it," added Walt. "Some sneak in this school must have watched us, and then sent the notes."

Much to the cadets' relief, they did not see Asa Lemm in the messroom. Nor did the language teacher show himself during the morning session.

"Perhaps he's having another talk with Colonel Colby," suggested Fred.

The youngest Rover was right. The unreasonable teacher was closeted with the master of the Hall for over an hour, and during that time much of what had been told by the cadets was threshed over. Asa Lemm was as unreasonable as ever, and finally Colonel Colby lost all patience with him.

"I am afraid, Professor Lemm, that you are not suited to be a teacher in this institution," he said. "Your actions here show that you are very

irritable and unreasonable. After you left this office, I questioned all of those cadets closely, and all had practically the same story to tell; namely, that you had required more than was fair of them in your classes, and that, on the slightest pretext, you had punished them by making them stay in and do extra lessons. I went into many of the details, and I am convinced that in a good proportion of the cases the students were right and you were wrong. Now, I regret this very much, because I realize that——"

"Sir, I don't want to be talked to in this fashion!" cried Asa Lemm, bridling up. "I was not in the wrong at all. Those boys are regular imps! They don't know how to treat a teacher decently! I won't stand for their nonsense! I want them severely punished, or else——"

"Wait a moment, Professor Lemm," interrupted the colonel, rising and facing him sternly. "I said I was sorry, and I am; but I feel that you are not the man to teach in this institution, and consequently I must ask you for your resignation. I will pay you your salary up to the first of next month, and you can leave this school just as soon as you desire."

"Wha—what? This! to me?" ejaculated the professor in consternation.

"Yes, sir. You can draw your pay, and,

if you wish, you can leave this morning."

"But—but—this is outrageous! I won't stand it! I was hired for the school year!"

"You were—on condition that your services were entirely satisfactory to me. They are not satisfactory, and consequently I am giving you this opportunity to resign."

"If I have to leave, I'll have those boys arrested!" stormed Asa Lemm.

"I don't think I'd be so foolish, if I were in your place, Professor. What they did was nothing but a foolish schoolboy joke, and they did that simply to get square with you for your unreasonable conduct toward them. I think the best you can do is to drop the matter. If you insist on dragging this affair before the public, perhaps the boys, and I, myself, will have something to say that you will not care to hear."

"We'll see—we'll see!" cried Asa Lemm, shaking his head and with his eyes blazing wrathfully. "We'll see about this!" and thus speaking, he stamped away.

CHAPTER XIV

OVERHEARING A PLOT

"Professor Lemm has left Colby Hall!"

"What do you mean, Jack? Left the Hall for good?"

"Yes, Randy."

"Who told you that?" questioned Fred eagerly.

"I just got it from Professor Brice. He said that old Lemon resigned, took his pay, and left yesterday afternoon while we were in classes."

"Hurrah! that's the best news I've heard in a year of Sundays!" cried Andy. "Gone for good! Just think of it!" and, in high spirits, he began to do a jig, and ended with a handspring across the room, landing with a violent thump on the bed.

"Hi, you, Andy!" remonstrated Jack. "Just because you are happy is no reason you should bust up my sleeping place."

"Wow! I feel fine enough to do almost anything," returned the fun-loving Rover. "Just to

think of it! We won't be worried by Asa Lemm any more!"

"Don't you be too sure of that," went on his cousin. "Asa Lemm is gone, it is true; but we may hear from him, nevertheless. When he went away he was an angry as ever, so Professor Brice said."

As was usual, the Rovers had congregated in their rooms, along with several of their chums. Outside it was snowing once again, the soft particles whirling in all directions and clinging fast to the window panes. It was the off hour of the afternoon, but none of the lads had cared to go outside, or even visit the school library.

The news that Asa Lemm had left the Hall was true. Following his heated interview with Colonel Colby, he had written out his resignation, accepted his pay for the month, packed his baggage, and left the school, never to return. Only several of the teachers and the man who had driven him away had seen him go; and this was as Colonel Colby wished it, for he was afraid that if the cadets were present at the disliked teacher's departure, they would make some sort of demonstration against him.

Strange as it may seem, Colonel Colby had said nothing further about punishing the cadets. Evidently he had taken their word for it that they

would not have played the trick on any other teacher in the school, and possibly he remembered what Andy had said to the effect that the boys had been punished beforehand for what had been done. A few of the lads were afraid that the matter might be taken up later, but the majority had reached the conclusion that they would hear no more concerning it.

"It's too bad it's snowing," said Jack, after he and the others had tired of speaking about the departed teacher. "I had an idea we would be able to get in some fine skating before we left for the Christmas holidays."

The Rover boys had not forgotten the fact that both Asa Lemm and Colonel Colby had received notes concerning the joke that had been played. They remembered well how Slugger Brown, as related in a previous volume, had sent an anonymous communication to Elias Lacy, accusing them of having shot the old farmer's cows.

"If Slugger was mean enough to send that letter, he'd be mean enough to send these notes," was the way Jack put it.

"I wish we could see one or both of the letters," remarked Randy. "We could very quickly tell if they were in Slugger's handwriting, or Nappy's either."

"Oh, you can bet they'd disguise their handwriting as much as possible," said Fred.

The snow continued the next day, and it was so windy and unpleasant outdoors that the battalion had to dispense with its outdoor parade and spend that time in a drill in the gymnasium. After this was over the Rovers and some of their chums amused themselves on the bars, swinging rings, and with the exercising machines the gymnasium afforded.

The boys were doing all sorts of stunts, when suddenly Fred called Randy to one side.

"Come on with me," he said in a low voice. "I think I've discovered something."

His manner showed that he had something unusual on his mind, and Randy lost no time in doing as was bidden. The two cousins hurried to a corner of the gymnasium, and then Fred led the way up a narrow stairway, which opened up on the second floor of the building, a place which was heated, but seldom used by the majority of the cadets. It was used more as a storeroom, and contained a lot of disused gymnasium paraphernalia and boxes and barrels.

"What's going on up here?" questioned Randy, when his cousin placed a hand over his mouth.

"I just saw Slugger and Nappy come up here with Codfish," whispered Fred. "And those three

wouldn't come to such an out-of-the-way place if there wasn't something in the wind."

"You're right there, Fred," was the equally low reply. "When those three get together on the sly there is generally something brewing."

Before emerging on the second floor of the gymnasium, they looked around cautiously. At the far end, near a steam radiator, they saw Slugger and Nappy seated on a couple of boxes, while Codfish rested on the top of an old nail keg. The two older boys were puffing away at cigarettes, something that was against the school rules.

"Might as well have a cigarette, Henry," Slugger was saying good-naturedly, and, at the same time, holding out a box.

"I—I don't think I will," answered Codfish.

"Oh, go ahead. It will make a man of you," put in Nappy; and, somewhat against his will, the small cadet took a cigarette and lit it.

While this was going on, Fred and Randy had managed to step from the top of the stairs to where a number of boxes were piled up. They moved along cautiously, and soon got to within a few feet of where the other three cadets were seated, without being noticed.

"Now, then, let's come to business!" remarked Slugger, after puffing away at a cigarette for a

moment. He blew a cloud of smoke to the ceiling. "I think now is a dandy time to get square with those Rovers."

"But you want to be careful—they are awful sly," said Codfish.

"I think you are mistaken, Henry. They didn't find out about those notes," and the bully chuckled.

"Just the same, Slug, I think we ought to take Cod's advice and be careful," broke in Nappy, lighting a fresh cigarette. "I have a hunch that the Rovers are watching us like a cat watches mice."

"Maybe they are. But I guess we know how to fool them," went on the bully swaggeringly. "And now is just our chance to get them into a hole."

"Explain, please."

"It's just like this, Nappy. Of course, they haven't admitted it, but you know just as well as I do that Colonel Colby must have punished them pretty severely for the trick they played on Lemm. What he did to them, we don't know, but probably he has given 'em some extra lessons to do, and maybe he's punished 'em in other ways."

"Oh, sure! he must have punished them somehow."

"I haven't seen any of them going down to

town since it happened," put in Codfish. "Maybe Colonel Colby made them promise to stay within bounds."

"Perhaps. Well, as I was saying, being punished, they, of course, are pretty sore on the colonel. Now then, if we can only play some dirty trick on Colonel Colby and make it appear as if the Rovers and their crowd did it, they'll sure get into hot water over it."

"I'm willing to do anything to square up with those fellows," grumbled Nappy. He paused for a moment to puff away at his cigarette. "What do you propose doing?"

"That, of course, is something we'll have to figure out. We'll want to be careful, so as not to get our own fingers burnt."

"I'll tell you what you might do!" broke in Codfish eagerly. "You might drop ashes all over Colonel Colby's office and his bedroom, and then leave some of the ashes in a box in the Rovers' rooms, and somebody might say something about having seen Jack Rover getting the ashes from the boiler-room."

"That's good as far as it goes, Henry, but it isn't quite strong enough," returned Slugger. "We ought to do something that will make Colonel Colby hopping mad."

"I'll tell you what let's do!" broke out Nappy.

"We'll use the ashes, and we'll use some other things too. I was down past the kitchen a while ago, and I heard one of the cooks complaining about some of the canned tomatoes which were all spoiled and he was going to throw out. Now, suppose we use some of those spoiled tomatoes with the ashes, and maybe a quart or two of ink. How about it?"

"Great!" exclaimed Slugger. "Ashes, ink and decayed tomatoes will make one fine combination, believe me!"

"Oh, you want to be very careful," remarked Codfish, his voice shaking a little. "The ink will be sure to spoil some things, not to mention the bad tomatoes."

"Well, we want to spoil something," returned Slugger. "We want to get Colonel Colby real mad. Maybe then he'll send the Rovers home."

"How soon do you suppose we can play this joke?" questioned Nappy, while Slugger lit a fresh cigarette.

"Perhaps we can play it very soon. We'll have to watch our chance," was the answer. Slugger held out his box of cigarettes to Codfish. "Here, Henry, have another."

"N-n-no, th-thank you," stammered the sneak. "I—I do—don't care to smoke any more. It—it makes my head dizzy."

"Oh, you'll soon get over that. Come on, be a real man and smoke up!" urged Slugger; and much against his will poor Codfish lit a second cigarette, he having dropped the other behind the nail keg.

This talk was followed by an animated discussion between Slugger and Nappy as to just how the proposed trick might be played. Codfish said but little. He was growing pale, and at the first chance threw away the second cigarette.

Of course Fred and Randy had listened to every word that was said. Ordinarily, the Rovers did not favor playing the part of eavesdroppers, but just now they thought they were amply justified in listening to everything that their enemies might have to say.

"They are a fine bunch if ever there was one!" whispered Randy.

"Come on away; I guess we've heard enough," answered his cousin. "The best thing we can do is to report to Jack and Andy, and then make up our minds what we are going to do next."

CHAPTER XV

AN ALARM OF FIRE

With great care, so as not to make any noise, the two Rover boys tiptoed their way back behind the boxes and barrels until they reached the narrow stairway.

"Come on! But don't make a bit of noise," said Randy quickly, and went down the stairs as rapidly as possible, with Fred at his heels. Reaching the lower floor of the gymnasium, they shut the door, and then lost no time in mixing with the other Rovers and their chums at the far end of the building.

"Where have you fellows been?" questioned Jack, who had suddenly noticed their absence.

"I'll tell you later," said Fred.

"Now, don't say a word more about our being away—especially if Slugger and Nappy and Codfish come this way. Act just as if we had been here right along."

"I get you, Randy," said Jack; and a minute later, as the others who had been mentioned came

into sight, he continued in a loud voice: "Go ahead, Randy, it's your turn. Have you been asleep?"

"No, I'm not asleep," answered Randy, and caught a ball which was being pitched around.

Fred began to practise on an exercising machine, and acted as if he had been at it for some time.

Soon Slugger, Nappy and Codfish came down and passed the crowd, eyeing all of them closely. Then Slugger winked to the others, and the three made their way slowly from the gymnasium building.

"Now then, I'll tell you fellows something," announced Fred; and thereupon he and his cousin related to the others what they had overheard in the upper room of the building.

"So that's their game, is it?" cried Jack wrathfully. "That's the way they are going to pay us back for agreeing to give them another chance at this school!"

"You ought to tell Colonel Colby about this at once," put in Spouter, who had listened to what was being said. "Then he can have those rascals watched."

"I don't like the idea of going to Colonel Colby," Jack answered. "I feel more like taking the matter in my own hands."

"Don't you do it, Jack," advised Gif. "Your idea would be all well enough if they were ordinary cadets. But they are not. They should have been dismissed from this school long ago. If I were you, I wouldn't dirty my hands on them. Report the matter to the colonel, and let him take charge of it."

"What is this you are saying, Garrison?" demanded a voice from close behind the cadets, and Professor Brice appeared in the doorway of the washroom of the gymnasium. "What is this you just said about Brown and Martell?"

"I said they were not fit to be cadets in this institution," answered Gif flatly.

"From what you young gentlemen have been saying, I should judge that you know something concerning Brown and Martell," went on the young teacher, with a glance around the crowd.

"We do know something," answered Walt, after a somewhat painful silence. "That is, two of the crowd here know. We have been urging them to speak to Colonel Colby about it."

"Who are the two, and what do you know?"

Again there was a silence, and then Spouter came to the front.

"Professor Brice, I'd like to ask a question," he said. "Two of the cadets here overheard a talk between Brown, Martell and Stowell. Those

three proposed to play a most outrageous trick on Colonel Colby, and then make it appear as if that trick had been played by some other cadets. In fact, they were going to make all the evidence point to those other cadets. Now, do you think those cadets ought to defend themselves by telling Colonel Colby all they know? They feel that they don't want to be tale bearers."

"If the trick was to be played solely to injure their reputation, they certainly ought to expose it," was the teacher's quick response. "It is one thing to tell on another person just for the sake of telling, and it is quite a different thing to defend one's own reputation."

Following this there was quite a discussion, but in the end Professor Brice convinced the Rovers that they had better tell the particulars of what they had overheard. He listened to their story with close attention.

"This is certainly worthy of an investigation," he said, after they had finished. "I'll tell Colonel Colby about it, and maybe he will send for you. If he does so, kindly take my advice and see to it that when you come to the colonel's office you are not watched by Brown, Martell and Stowell, or that may spoil everything. I think that the colonel will agree with me that the thing to do is to catch those fellows red-handed."

"All right, Professor, we'll leave everything in your hands," answered Fred. Even yet he did not feel just right over what had been done. He still felt that he and his cousins should have settled affairs privately with Slugger Brown and his cronies, even if it had been a matter of fist fights.

The young professor lost no time in going to Colonel Colby. He found the master of the Hall in his study looking over the questions which were to be used in the coming examination.

"I am sorry to report more trouble, sir," he announced, and, sitting down, he gave Colonel Colby a rapid sketch of what had taken place at the gymnasium.

"Too bad! too bad!" and the master of the Hall showed his disappointment. He heaved a sigh. "It looks to me, Brice, as if I had made a mistake in giving Brown and Martell another chance."

"Just what I was thinking, sir," returned the young teacher.

"You say the Rovers did not wish to report the matter?"

"That's it, sir. I had to fairly drag the story out of them. They did not want to have the reputation of tale bearers."

"I think I understand their view of it, Brice. At the same time, this is too serious a matter to allow them to settle it between themselves. I

think the best thing we can do is to have those three cadets watched closely, to see if they really intend to carry out their nefarious plot."

"Exactly what I was thinking, Colonel Colby."

"First, however, you may send Randy Rover and his Cousin Fred to me. I want to question them, so as to make sure of my ground."

Expecting this call, Randy and Fred kept themselves in readiness, and as soon as Professor Brice came for them they hurried off to the office, taking care that none of their enemies should see them. Slugger, Nappy and Codfish, however, were out of sight, having gone upstairs to their rooms.

"Now, I want you to tell me exactly what was said," announced Colonel Colby, as soon as the two cadets appeared.

They had their story well in mind, and it did not take long to give the master of the Hall all of the details. In the midst of the conversation, Fred let drop accidentally that the three unworthy cadets had been smoking.

"They were smoking?" interrupted the colonel.

"Yes, sir. But—I—I—didn't mean to mention that," stammered Fred.

"What were they smoking, Rover?"

"Cigarettes."

"All of them?"

"Yes, sir. Although, to tell the truth, Codfish —I mean Stowell—didn't seem to want to smoke, but Slugger—that is, Brown—urged him, so that he didn't know how to get out of it. I guess the cigarette made him sick."

"I see." Colonel Colby nodded his head slowly. "Now go on;" and then the story of what had been overheard in the upper room of the gymnasium was finished.

"It's an outrage! an outrage! if what you say is true; and I have no reason to doubt your word," went on the master of the Hall, after the cadets had finished. "I am sorry now that I gave Brown and Martell this chance to return to our school."

To this neither of the Rovers made any reply. For an instant both of them thought of the trick they had played on Asa Lemm. Colonel Colby seemed to follow their thought.

"Your trick and this thing are two entirely different affairs," continued the colonel. "In the one case, you, in your boyish fashion, tried to square up for the way you had been mistreated. In this case, however, these cadets are trying to get you into trouble, and if this trick had succeeded, it is just possible that I might have been angry enough to send you and the rest of your family home."

"Well, don't send Brown and Martell home on our account," announced Randy. "We are not afraid of them."

"That may be, Rover. But I cannot have such underhand work at this school. Now I want you cadets to do me a favor. I want you to act exactly as if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred. I want you to tell all of the others to keep quiet about this. I want to set a trap, and if possible catch those rascals in the midst of their work. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," came from both of the cadets.

"Then that is all."

Allowed to leave the office, Randy and Fred lost no time in hunting up the others, who had gone upstairs to the Rover boys' rooms. On the way, they met Walt, Spouter and Gif, and told these cadets to come along. Then they closed the door to the hallway.

"It's to be kept a secret," announced Randy.

In subdued voices, so that no one passing in the hallway might hear them, the Rovers and their chums discussed the situation. They were in the midst of this when they suddenly heard a wild cry of alarm. Then came a rush of footsteps, and less than a minute later the loud clanging of a bell.

"Hello! what's that?" exclaimed Jack.

"Something is wrong—that's sure!" announced Randy.

"What's the bell ringing for?" queried Fred. "It isn't time for parade yet."

"That isn't the parade bell!" ejaculated Gif. "That's the fire bell! There must be a fire!"

The boys flung open the doors, and ran hastily into the hallway. Cadets were pouring forth from every quarter, and there was a tremendous excitement.

"Is the building on fire?"

"Take it easy, boys! Take it easy!" yelled Major Ralph Mason, as he appeared at the head of one of the stairways. "There is no fire in this building. Don't get excited."

"Where is the fire?" queried a dozen voices in chorus.

"It's down at the gym! The upper floor is in flames!"

CHAPTER XVI

PUTTING OUT THE FLAMES

"WHAT do you know about that! The gym is on fire!" gasped Fred, and clutched Randy by the arm. He looked at his cousin knowingly.

"I know what you're thinking, Fred. Those cigarettes that Slugger, Nappy and Codfish were smoking——"

"That's it! They threw them down recklessly, and also threw down the matches they had lighted."

"If the gym burns down Colonel Colby will hold them responsible for the loss," put in Jack, who had heard what was said.

While this talk was taking place, all of the cadets were rushing down the stairs. Soon they were out on the campus and headed through the fast-falling snow in the direction of the gymnasium building.

A heavy smoke was pouring from a broken-out upper window, and also from the edges of a scuttle on the roof. As the cadets hurried closer,

they saw a thin flame show itself for a moment just inside the window.

"It's on fire all right enough, but maybe they can get it under control," announced Jack. "Come on, fellows! Do your duty!"

Warned by the fate which had overtaken Putnam Hall, Colonel Colby had taken every possible precaution against fire. There were several large water towers erected in and near the school buildings, and these were connected with various fire plugs. There were also numerous lengths of hose, with nozzles attached, hung up in the several buildings, and both the cadets and the teachers had been instructed in a fire drill.

Some of the cadets, who had been in the gymnasium when the fire was discovered, had already brought out the hose in that building and attached it to one of the plugs. Now this water was turned on, and a stream of fair size began to play upon the flames, the cadets, aided by one of the teachers, dragging the hose up the narrow stairway for that purpose.

"Get out hose number three and number eight!" directed Colonel Colby, who was on the scene; and the cadets went to work with a will, and soon had two more streams in action.

Despite the thickness of the smoke, two of the teachers and several of the cadets had gone up

into the second floor of the building and located the fire.

"It's up near the steam radiator, just between the two windows," announced one of the teachers. "It's in some boxes and barrels that contain straw and excelsior."

"Isn't the building on fire?" queried one cadet.

"The flames are going up to the roof, but so far they haven't broken through."

The announcement that the fire so far was confined to some boxes and barrels, nerved the cadets and the others to make a greater effort to get it under control, and some began to fill buckets with water in the washroom below, and these were passed up the narrow stairway and the water thrown where it was apparently most needed.

Randy and Andy were in this bucket brigade, while Fred and Jack worked with one of the hose gangs. It was exciting labor for all of the boys, but this they did not mind.

"Hurrah! we're getting it under control!" shouted Major Mason presently. "Keep it up, boys, and we'll save the whole building!"

In the crowd were, of course, Slugger, Nappy and Codfish. At the first alarm they had run forth from the school and gazed in amazement at the smoke pouring from the gymnasium.

"Oh, look! It's the gym that's on fire!" Codfish had burst out; and then the little sneak had suddenly turned deadly pale, and would have sunk down in the snow had not Slugger caught him.

"See here, Codfish!" hissed the bully, shaking him. "Don't you say a word about this, do you understand? Not a word!"

"Don't you dare to admit to anybody that you were upstairs in the gymnasium," added Nappy.

"I—I ain't going to say nothing!" sniveled Codfish, and then, of a sudden, burst out crying. "You fellows let me alone! I didn't want to smoke anyhow!" he wailed.

"Shut up! Don't you mention smoking to anybody, or I'll just about half kill you!" hissed Slugger. "Now mind! not a word, if you know when you are best off!" and then he gave Codfish's arm such a twist that the little cadet screamed with pain.

Not to be suspected of what they had done, Slugger and Nappy mingled with the other cadets and did their full share in working on the lines of hose; but there were really more cadets than were needed for this labor, so they had little to do. Codfish also tried to take hold, but he trembled so that he soon had to give up, and then he ran back into the Hall, where he sat on the stairs, half sobbing.

By this time there was little more than smoke to be seen in the upper part of the gymnasium. The teachers and the cadets still continued to play water into the building. Some now began to open all the windows, realizing that a draft could not do much harm. Then, as the smoke began to clear away, they began an investigation, so that the last spark of the fire might be extinguished.

"I guess it's about out," announced Professor Brice presently. He had worked hard, and his face and hands were streaked with black.

"I think you are right, Brice," answered Colonel Colby, who had also mounted to the upper floor. "We may as well bring up a few buckets of water, and then turn off all the hose. There is no use of flooding the building, especially in this cold weather. As it is, I think the boys will have a skating pond below by morning," and he smiled faintly.

"Do you suppose this started from the heating plant?" questioned the teacher.

"Not at all!" was the low reply. "But we won't speak about that now, Brice," added Colonel Colby significantly; and thereupon the young teacher understood and said no more about the matter.

The cadets were sent below, and Colonel Colby

and Professor Brice, aided by a couple of the hired men, made a close examination of the spot where the fire had taken place. It had been confined almost wholly to three boxes, loosely filled with excelsior, and two barrels containing straw and waste paper.

"It was a mistake to put such inflammable material up here," said Colonel Colby to Mr. Crews, the gymnasium instructor.

"I realize that now, Colonel Colby," answered Silas Crews, and his manner showed how much the fire had upset him. "But, you see, it was this way. We got some of that new gymnasium material in only a couple of weeks ago, and we weren't altogether satisfied with it—if you will remember. I said something about sending it back. Well, it came in those boxes and barrels, and so I just put them up here, thinking that maybe we'd want to use them in sending the stuff back. If it hadn't been for that, I'd have cleaned the boxes and barrels out and burnt the stuff up."

"I see, Crews. Well, after this, I want you to be careful and not do anything like that again."

"But I don't see how the boxes and barrels caught fire, sir," went on the gymnasium instructor perplexedly. "We had no light up here, and I don't see how they could catch from that little

steam radiator over there. Why, that radiator hardly gets warm!" It may be mentioned here that the radiator had been placed on the upper floor of the gymnasium because there had once been talk of partitioning this part of the floor from the rest and making of it a meeting room for one of the cadet clubs.

"I'll make an investigation later," answered Colonel Colby. "For the present, as the steam heating plant seems to be in perfect order, you had better start the fire up well, so that we can dry things out here. Otherwise, all the pipes may freeze up, and that might give us more trouble than this fire."

"Yes, sir. I'll see to it, sir," said Silas Crews hastily. "And I'll have this whole place cleaned up the first thing in the morning. And I'll also have the broken windows fixed."

As soon as he returned to the school, Colonel Colby sent for Randy and Fred. He questioned them closely about the cigarette smoking indulged in by Slugger, Nappy and Codfish.

"You two are quite sure that you were not smoking yourselves?" he demanded sternly.

"We don't smoke, sir," answered Randy promptly.

"Did you light any matches while you were upstairs in the gymnasium?"

"No, sir. We had no need for a light," returned Fred.

"Have you any idea how this fire started?"

"I don't see how it could start unless it was from the cigarettes and the matches those fellows used," answered Randy bluntly. "I hate to make that statement, but the truth is the truth."

"I believe you are right, Rover. Now then, I wish you to do me a favor. I want you to keep as quiet about this as you are to keep quiet about that joke those cadets proposed to play. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," answered both the Rovers.

"Then that is all for the present;" and, so speaking, Colonel Colby dismissed the boys.

"I guess he's going to save this fire affair until he catches them trying to play the joke," was Fred's comment, as they hurried away to join the others.

"That's it, Fred." Randy looked at his cousin knowingly. "There is certainly something coming to Slugger, Nappy and Codfish, isn't there?"

CHAPTER XVII

CAUGHT IN THE ACT

THE news that there had been a fire at Colby Hall soon spread to the town and to Clearwater Hall, and there were many anxious inquiries over the telephone and otherwise as to whether anybody had been hurt.

"No, nobody was hurt, and the fire didn't amount to much," said Spouter, when called up by his Cousin May. "Perhaps, when we see you girls personally, we'll have something to tell you that will be a surprise."

In the middle of the afternoon of the day following the fire, a number of letters were brought in by one of the hired men from the Haven Point post-office.

"Here's a drop letter for you, Jack," remarked Gif, who was distributing some of the mail. "Most likely from your best girl," and he smiled good-naturedly.

"Doesn't look much like a girl's handwriting," answered the oldest Rover boy, as he inspected

the envelope. Wondering what the letter might contain, he tore open the envelope and was considerably surprised to read the following, written on a raggedly-torn half sheet of note paper:

"You Rovers think yourselves smart, but do not forget that I am not done with you. You have been the means of my losing a very lucrative position. I will not have you arrested, for it would be a hard matter for me to obtain justice in this neighborhood; but I will remember you, and some day I will bring you to book for what you have done. You are nothing but a set of imps and hoodlums, and sooner or later Colby will learn the truth."

"This is undoubtedly from Professor Lemm," announced Jack, as he allowed his cousins and their chums to read the letter.

"He's certainly a sweet-natured man," was Andy's comment. "He's real charitable and kind, isn't he?" and this brought forth a smile from the others.

"What do you think he'll do?" questioned Fred.

"I don't believe he'll do anything," answered Jack. "Fellows who write such anonymous communications are usually cowards. Old Lemon

belongs in the class with Slugger, Nappy & Company."

The heavy snowstorm cleared away as rapidly as it had come, and the wind blew the snow from large sections of the lake, so that the cadets could once more enjoy themselves skating.

"Let's skate up to Clearwater Hall and see the girls," suggested Jack at the first opportunity; and this was agreed to readily by all of the crowd.

They found the girls of Clearwater Hall on the ice, watching out for them, and soon the cadets and the girls were enjoying themselves thoroughly.

"You must tell me all about the fire and about how Professor Lemm happened to leave the Hall," said Ruth, as she skated away with Jack.

"I'll do that," he answered. "But you must keep a good part of what I'm going to tell you a secret—at least for the present," he added, and then gave the particulars of the joke which had been played on the disliked teacher. Then he told of what had occurred at the gymnasium.

"Oh, Jack! do you really think Slugger and Nappy and that little Codfish set the gymnasium on fire?" cried the girl.

"I think they did, Ruth—although, of course, it was by accident."

"What dreadful boys they must be getting to be," sighed the girl.

She had quite a few things to tell about happenings at the Hall, and also mentioned what she intended to do during the Christmas holidays.

"I wish you were coming down to New York," said Jack. "I'd like first rate to have you meet my Sister Martha and my Cousin Mary."

"Perhaps I shall get down there some time, Jack. Are you going to stay at home during all of the holidays?"

"No. We have been planning to stay at home about a week, and then, if we can arrange it, we want to visit Snowshoe Island and do a little hunting before school opens again."

"Then you're going to accept old Uncle Barney's invitation!"

"That's the idea, Ruth. You don't mind, do you?" and the oldest Rover boy looked anxiously at his companion.

"Not at all. In fact, I'm rather glad to hear of your going to the island. It may give you a chance to talk to old Uncle Barney about my folks. And if you get any such chance, I hope you'll impress it upon him that we want to be friends."

When the cadets returned to Colby Hall, both Jack and Fred were in unusual good humor, for,

not only had Ruth said she would try to get down to New York during the holidays, but May had told Fred that if Spouter came down to the metropolis she would try to accompany her cousin.

Several days slipped by, and the Rover boys applied themselves closely to their lessons, for they wished to make as good a showing as possible during the coming examinations. During that time, they saw Slugger, Nappy and Codfish a number of times, but all of those unworthies seemed to give them a wide berth.

Although Colonel Colby had not given the Rovers any of the particulars of what he proposed to do, he had not forgotten what Randy and Fred had told him. He had had a conference on the subject with Professor Brice, Silas Crews, and Bob Nixon, the chauffeur, and Nixon and Crews were detailed to watch every movement made by the bully and his cronies.

It was on the following Tuesday, the day previous to the examinations, that Silas Crews came hurrying to the master of the Hall, who had just entered the school library in search of a certain book.

"I think Brown and Martell are at it," he announced in a low tone of voice. "Martell just sneaked a quart bottle of ink from the storeroom,

while Brown picked up some of the cans of vegetables which were cast aside by the cook as unfit to eat. Now they have both gone down into the boiler-room, evidently after those ashes."

"Continue to watch them, Crews, and tell Nixon to watch them, too. I will notify Professor Brice, and also Captain Dale." Captain Dale was the military instructor of the Academy.

Silas Crews hurried off, and Colonel Colby lost no time in notifying the others of what was taking place. As a result, a guard was established, which took cognizance of every move made by Slugger and Nappy. Why it was that Codfish was not with them, nobody knew. The fact was, the poor little sneak had been so terrified at the mere mention of doing anything further that he had burst out crying and locked himself in his room, stating that he was too sick to act.

Having obtained the bottle of ink and several cans of spoiled tomatoes, Slugger and Nappy watched their chance and visited the boiler-room under the school. Here they found a dozen large cans of ashes, and also an old empty soap-box.

"We'll fill the soap box half full of ashes," said Slugger, "and then we can place the opened-up cans of tomatoes and the opened-up bottle of ink on top. When we get the stuff over to Colonel Colby's rooms, we can spread half of every-

thing around where it will make the best showing, then we can skip over to the offices and do the same thing, and after that we'll rush back and leave a little trail of ashes and some ink leading into the Rovers' rooms, and place the empty ink bottle and the empty cans in their closets and put the ash-box under one of the beds."

"Dandy!" replied Nappy. "Come on!"

Not knowing that Bob Nixon was watching them from a corner of the boiler-room, they soon had the box of ashes and other stuff ready. Then, watching their chance to see that the coast was clear, they sneaked up out of the boiler-room and then out of the school by a side door. Here a path led to the nearby building where Colonel Colby had his private suite of rooms.

"Now then, hurry up!" cried Nappy, who was beginning to show signs of nervousness.

They found the door to the main room unlocked, and both entered and set the box of stuff on one of the easy chairs. Then one took up the ink and the other an opened can of the decayed tomatoes.

"Now make a fine job of it," whispered Slugger.

Both took a step forward to start their nefarious work, when each was almost paralyzed by hearing Colonel Colby's voice.

"Stop!" commanded the master of the school, and stepped out from behind a screen which stood near a corner of the apartment.

"Oh!" ejaculated Nappy. "We're discovered!" and, dropping the bottle of ink in his hands, he started to run.

"Not so quick, Martell!" came from the doorway, and then both of the youths were startled to see themselves confronted by Bob Nixon. Behind the chauffeur stood Captain Dale, while in another doorway appeared the form of Professor Brice.

"Wa—wa—what does this mean?" stammered Slugger. He knew not what to say or do.

"It means that I have found you out," answered Colonel Colby sternly. "You will both march over to my office at once."

CHAPTER XVIII

HOME AGAIN

"Good riddance to bad rubbish!"

"You told the truth that time, Andy. We're certainly well rid of Slugger Brown and Nappy Martell."

"Say! I'd like to know some of the particulars of the interview Slugger and Nappy had with Colonel Colby. It must have been a pippin," remarked Fred.

"One thing is certain—Colonel Colby must have laid down the law pretty severely to them; otherwise they would never have gotten out of this school in such a hurry," came from Jack.

"I'm mighty glad I got that one crack in on Martell," remarked Fred. "Some day I'll give that fellow a licking, big as he is," continued the youngest of the Rover boys.

"The only fellow I'm sorry for is Codfish," came from Randy. "That poor little rat looks about as miserable as any kid could look."

"He ought to be thankful that he wasn't kicked

out with the others," said Spouter. "He certainly deserved it."

"He did," agreed Jack. "Just the same, now that Slugger and Nappy are gone, if Codfish wants to turn over a new leaf and make a man of himself, I'm not going to stand in his way."

Twenty-four hours had passed since the events recorded in the previous chapter. They had been filled with both mystery and excitement for the Rover boys and their chums. Only a little of what had taken place in Colonel Colby's office had filtered out to the cadets, but it was enough to show them that the master of the Hall had dealt severely with Slugger and Nappy. Those two unworthies had come forth looking both cowed and excited, and they had rushed up to their rooms to pack their belongings without delay.

In the meanwhile, Codfish had come forth sobbing, and had been allowed to go to his room, where he locked himself in and denied himself even to Mrs. Crews, the matron who looked after the younger scholars.

"I—I don't want to see no—nobody!" Codfish had cried out. "Go away and leave me alone! I—I didn't mean to do anything! It was Brown and Martell made me do it!" and then he had burst into another fit of weeping.

Both the Rover boys and their chums had

wanted to see how the bully and his crony would act after their interview with Colonel Colby. They met Slugger and Nappy in the hall as they were on the point of leaving the school, and some sharp words had passed. Nappy had threatened Fred, and made a savage pass at him with his fist. In return, the youngest Rover had landed on the other's chin, and sent Nappy staggering up against the wall.

In the meanwhile, there had been a set-to between Slugger and Jack, and although the oldest Rover boy was struck on the shoulder, he had had the satisfaction of making the bully measure his length on his back. Then the approach of Professor Brice, backed up by Captain Dale and Bob Nixon, had brought the brief contests to a close, and Slugger and Nappy had lost no time in hurrying below, where the auto-stage was already in waiting to take them and their baggage to Haven Point. Many of the cadets assembled had jeered at the departing youths, and they, in their rage, had shaken their fists at those left behind as the auto-stage departed.

"I hope we never see those fellows again," remarked Randy. But this wish was doomed to disappointment—the Rovers were to see a good deal more of Slugger Brown and Nappy Martell.

The boys had now to apply themselves to their

examinations, and they went at this with a will, resolved to make the best showing possible.

"We've got to do it," was the way Jack expressed himself. "We want the folks at home to know that we are keeping at our studies. Then, if they happen to hear of some of the jokes we play, they will know that we're doing something else here besides having fun."

The lads had already written home regarding the Christmas holidays and what they would like to do. In return, they received word that they could have Gif and Spouter down for the week between Christmas and New Year's if they so desired. And Jack's mother also sent a letter to Spouter inviting him to bring along his Cousin May and her friend, Ruth.

"All of us, including Martha and Mary, will be glad to become acquainted with your cousin and her school chum," wrote Mrs. Dick Rover. "The girls are very anxious to learn more about Clearwater Hall, and it is just possible that we may send them to that school later on."

"Hurrah! that's fine!" cried Jack, when Spouter showed him the letter. "If only May and Ruth go to New York, I'm sure they'll be able to persuade Martha and Mary that there

is no better girls' school on earth than Clearwater Hall."

"You leave that to me, Jack," answered Spouter. "I'll tell May just what to do."

Of course the Rover boys were all very anxious after the examinations were over to find out how they had fared. On the following Friday afternoon Colonel Colby read the results. Fred and Randy had received ninety-four per cent., Jack had gotten ninety-two, and Andy had reached eighty-eight. As seventy per cent. was the passing mark, it can be seen that the boys had passed with considerable to spare.

"My, that's a relief!" sighed Andy. "Somehow, at the last minute, I was afraid I had fallen down completely. There were a few examples in algebra that were regular stickers for me."

"Physiology was what got me," observed Jack grimly. "How do I know how many bones I've got in my body? I never saw them," and at this there was a general smile.

After the examinations there was but little to do at the school apart from the drills. There was an entertainment given by the boys in which both Jack and Andy took part. Then, almost before they knew it, the session came to an end, and the cadets had packed up and were on their way home.

"After all, I'll be glad to see little old New York once more," remarked Randy, when they and their friends were seated on the train.

"Right you are!" cried Fred. "I think, after the semi-country life at Haven Point, a big city will look mighty good to us."

"Say, fellows, do you remember when we came up to the school, how we fell in with Asa Lemm?" remarked Andy.

"I haven't forgotten it!" cried his twin, and then he added quickly: "I wonder if old Lemon wrote to our folks."

"I don't think so," answered Jack. "If he had, I think we would have heard of it."

When the boys arrived at the Grand Central Terminal, they found Martha and Mary and Tom Rover awaiting them.

"Glad to see you back, boys!" cried the father of the twins, as he greeted them warmly, and then greeted the others.

"Oh, Jack, I declare you're growing awfully tall!" burst out his sister Martha, as she embraced him.

"Well, I guess Fred is growing tall, too," put in Mary Rover.

"Well, you wouldn't expect any of us to grow shorter, would you?" queried Andy gaily, and this made both of the girls laugh.

With greetings all around finished, the whole party pushed its way through the crowd to the Forty-second Street entrance of the Terminal, where two of the Rover limousines were in waiting.

"This looks something like!" remarked Jack, when the automobiles were on their way through the busy streets to Riverside Drive. "I haven't seen so many people since I left."

"And how do you like Colby Hall?" questioned his sister eagerly.

"Dandy, Martha! It couldn't be beat! I can tell you, we boys are mighty glad that our dads picked out such a bully good school for us," and his face showed his satisfaction.

"And what about Clearwater Hall?"

"That's a dandy place, too,—at least, the girls who go there say it is. If May Powell comes down with Spouter, she'll tell you all about it."

The home-coming of the Rover boys was a gala occasion. Dick Rover and his brother Sam had just come up home from the offices in Wall Street, and they and their wives, as well as the twins' mother, greeted the lads affectionately .

"It's been kind of lonely since you went away," said Mrs. Tom Rover, as she caught each of the twins around the waist.

"I suppose you missed our tricks, Ma," returned Andy slyly.

"Maybe I did, Andy. But I wouldn't mind the tricks so much if only you were here," and she gave a little sigh.

"Well, we're going to be here for a week, anyway," put in Randy, and then both of the twins gave their mother such a hug as she had not received for a long time.

Jack was already telling his father and his two uncles something about Colby Hall. All of the men listened with close attention and considerable satisfaction.

"I guess Larry has patterned it pretty closely after Putnam Hall and West Point," remarked Sam Rover. "And that's as it should be, to my way of thinking."

"He'd have to go a long way to do better," answered Tom Rover. "Everybody knows that West Point is an ideal school, and dear old Putnam Hall was a close second to it."

"I hope you lads haven't been playing too many tricks," went on Dick Rover, as he gazed from one face to another before him.

"Well, Uncle Dick, we had to play *some* tricks," answered Andy, a bit lamely.

"You couldn't expect us to just sit still and hold our hands," added Randy.

"We might as well own up to one thing," said Jack boldly. "We did play a trick on one of the teachers—a fellow named Asa Lemm. Nobody liked Lemm, and when Colonel Colby had a rumpus with him and made him resign, all of us felt better."

Fortunately for the boys, an interruption came just at that moment in the way of an announcement that dinner was ready. This was served in the Dick Rover home, and was participated in by all of the members of the Rover family. It made quite a table full.

"Gee! but it's nice to be here once more!" exclaimed Andy, while he was eating.

"Beats a meal in the mess-room at the Hall all hollow, doesn't it?" returned his twin.

"And yet you talk about going away on a hunting trip," broke in their father quizzically.

"Oh, yes! But Uncle Tom, we are going to spend a whole week in New York before that!" broke in Fred.

"I want to know a little more about this trip you're planning to Snowshoe Island," remarked Dick Rover. "I want to make sure that it's a perfectly safe place for you to visit."

"Oh, I'm sure it's safe enough," answered Jack; and thereupon he and the others told what they knew about the island and Barney Stevenson.

"That old lumberman must be quite a character," was Dick Rover's comment. "Well, we'll see about this trip later," and there, for the time being, the matter was dropped.

The boys had gotten home just two days before Christmas, and they spent their entire time the next day in shopping for presents. In this they were partly aided by Martha and Mary, especially when it came to selecting presents for their mothers. Then, however, they sent the girls away, so that they might buy something for them. Although they did not mention this, Jack also wished to get a little reminder for Ruth, while Fred was equally desirous of obtaining something for May.

Christmas dawned bright and clear, and many were the cries of joy which rang throughout the three Rover households. All the young folks spent over an hour in running back and forth, wishing this one and that one "Merry Christmas!" Then came the distribution of presents.

"Just what I wanted!" cried Fred, as he inspected his pile of gifts. There was a new watch, some gorgeous neckties, several books, and a splendid little double-barrelled shotgun.

"Don't say a word! It couldn't be better!" came from Randy.

"The best Christmas ever!" echoed his twin. They, too, had numerous gifts, including little

diamond stickpins, new skates, some boxing gloves, and bright-colored sweaters, into which their cousins had knitted the initials C. H.

"Now, I presume, you'll be real Colby Hall cadets," said their mother, when they had donned the sweaters and were strutting around in them.

"This sure is one grand Christmas!" said Jack. He, too, had fared well, receiving a beautiful seal ring, a new traveling bag, completely equipped, several sets of books for which he had longed greatly, and also a small, but first-class, repeating rifle.

"Now we've certainly got to go on that hunt," remarked Fred, placing his new shotgun beside the new rifle.

"Right you are, Fred!" responded Jack. "But first we're going to have one dandy time down here in New York."

CHAPTER XIX

OFF FOR SNOWSHOE ISLAND

"WHAT an awfully large place New York is!"

It was Ruth who uttered the words while she was taking a ride down Fifth Avenue in company with Jack and his sister and several of the others.

It was the day after Christmas, and Spouter had arrived at noon, bringing his cousin May and Ruth with him. The young folks were taking a ride previous to stopping at the Grand Central Terminal to meet Gif, who was to come later.

"You won't find many places larger," answered Dick. He felt very happy to think that Ruth was beside him, and more so because Ruth and his sister seemed to become good friends from the very moment they met.

Behind the first auto came a second, containing Spouter, May, Mary, and Fred. They, too, were enjoying themselves, the youngest Rover doing what he could to point out the various places of interest to Spouter's fair cousin.

The Rover boys, aided by Mary and Martha, had laid their plans for the next five days with care. The young folks were to be taken to Central and Bronx Parks, to several well-known theaters, and also to the Grand Opera, and Mrs. Dick Rover had arranged to give a party at her home in the visitors' honor.

Mary and Martha had been eager to hear about Clearwater Hall, and the two girl visitors were not slow in singing the praises of that institution.

"Oh, I think I'd like to go there!" cried Martha. "What do you think, Mary?"

"I think I'd like to go myself, now that we know somebody there," was her cousin's reply. Mary had always been a little shy.

During those days of pleasure in New York only one thing occurred to mar the happiness of the young folks. That was one afternoon when all of them went over to Central Park for a couple of hours to enjoy the skating. There, quite unexpectedly, they ran into Nappy Martell. He favored the Rover boys with a black look, and then lost himself in the crowd of skaters.

"He certainly has no love for us," was Jack's comment. "If he could possibly do us an injury, I think he would do it."

But aside from this incident the young folks had nothing to worry them, and they spent a most

agreeable time on the ice. They talked a good deal of nonsense, and often laughed when there was no apparent cause for so doing, but that was due entirely to their high spirits. When they returned to the Rover homes the girls had a glow in their cheeks and a sparkle in their eyes that made them more beautiful than ever.

"That Ruth Stevenson is certainly a handsome girl," whispered Mrs. Dick Rover to her husband.

"So she is, Dora," answered Dick. "And if you'll notice, our Jack has quite an eye for her," he added dryly.

"Oh, Dick! you don't suppose he's smitten with her? Why, he's so young!"

"I'm not saying anything about that, Dora. I can't help but remember that I was smitten with you the first time I saw you," and at this Dora Rover gave her husband a warm look that meant a great deal.

May had not forgotten her promise to her Cousin Spouter, and during the visit she did all she could to impress on the older folks the charms of life at Clearwater Hall. She told of what fine teachers there were at the school, how rapidly most of the pupils advanced in their studies, and of the good times to be had there.

"And I do hope that you will let Mary and

Martha join us," she concluded. "I am sure they will feel perfectly at home there, and that they will be as well taught, if not better, than they would be if they remained here in the city."

"I'll think it over, May," answered Mrs. Sam Rover; and Martha's mother said the same.

Jack and his cousins had already sent a letter to Barney Stevenson, completing the arrangements for going up to Snowshoe Island. Now came a brief communication from the old lumberman, stating that he would be on the look-out for them, and would do all he could to make their outing enjoyable.

"What a nice letter for him to write!" exclaimed Ruth, when Jack showed her the communication. "Oh, I do hope you'll be able to fix up this difference between old Uncle Barney and my folks! It's dreadful to have him on the outs with our family."

"As I said before, Ruth, I'll do what I can," Jack replied.

With so much going on, the holidays sped by swiftly, and all too soon it was time for the visitors to take their departure. Spouter and Gif both wished they could accompany the Rovers to Snowshoe Island, but this was not to be, as they had already made other arrangements.

"But have a good time," said Spouter.

"Don't forget to lay low a few deer and a bear or two," added Gif.

"Good gracious! you don't expect them to shoot bears, do you?" exclaimed May, in some alarm.

"I don't believe there are any bears on that island, are there?" came from Ruth.

"There are very few bears anywhere," answered Jack. "Gif was only fooling. The biggest game that we may possibly see will be a deer, although even they are growing scarce. We may see nothing bigger than squirrels, rabbits and partridges, and maybe a mink or a fox."

The Rover boys accompanied the others to the Grand Central Terminal. Here Jack managed to have a few words in private with Ruth, and at the conclusion he gave her hand so tight a squeeze that she blushed. Then the visitors boarded the train and in a minute more were gone.

"And now to get ready for the trip to Snowshoe Island!" cried Randy.

"That's the talk!" returned his twin.

The boys were to leave for Rockville, the nearest railroad station to Snowshoe Island, on the day after New Year's. They spent several hours in packing their things, being advised in that matter by their fathers, who, as my old readers know, had been on many hunting expeditions before them.

"Now, there is no use of my giving you any advice on how to handle your firearms," said Dick Rover. "I have given you that advice before, and you ought to remember what I said."

"I do, Dad," answered his son. "And I'm sure the others remember, too."

"And I want you two boys to keep out of mischief," put in Tom Rover, addressing his twins. "Of course, you can have all the fun you please, but let it be good, innocent nonsense. Don't do anything mean, and don't do anything to get somebody else into trouble."

"And my advice is, to go slow and be careful," added Sam Rover. "In other words: 'Look before you leap'——"

"As the clown in the circus said," finished Tom Rover, "when he thought he was going to jump through a paper hoop and found instead that it was a solid white barrel-head;" and at this little joke there was a general laugh.

The boys had already told their fathers about the doings of Nappy Martell and Slugger Brown.

"Nappy Martell is evidently the son of his father," remarked Dick Rover. "The senior Martell is just as domineering, and not one bit more reliable. Down in Wall Street we've been watching him pretty closely."

"Yes, and he needed watching," put in Tom

Rover. "To my mind, if he isn't a fraud, he's pretty close to it."

"You said something about his underhanded work before," came from Sam. "If he is a swindler, I certainly hope that sooner or later they expose him."

The boys had learned that Rockville was a town of considerable importance and boasted of several good-sized stores. They felt certain that they could buy all the supplies needed at that place, so it would be unnecessary to get them in New York. They, however, took along all the clothing that was needed, and likewise their guns and a good supply of ammunition.

"Now do be careful!" pleaded Mrs. Tom Rover, when they were ready to depart. "I don't want any of you to get shot."

"Don't you worry, Ma. We'll be careful all right enough," answered Randy, as he kissed her good-bye.

Several of the neighboring boys had come to see them off, and there was a little bit of envy as these watched the Rovers depart. They went to the railroad station in one of the limousines, only the two girls going with them to see them off.

"Now don't get hurt, Jack," said Martha, when it was almost time for him to take the train. "Remember, if you do, Ruth will never forgive

"WHAT A NICE LETTER FOR HIM TO WRITE!" EXCLAIMED RUTH.

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you," and she gave her brother a roguish look which, somehow, made his cheeks burn.

"Aw, cut that, Martha!" he answered. And then, of a sudden, he continued: "You join those girls at Clearwater Hall, and I'll pick a fine cadet for you to go out with."

"Boo!" cried Martha, and put out the tip of her tongue at him. "Who said I wanted any of your old cadets!" Then, as he and his cousins ran for the train, she waved him an affectionate farewell.

The boys had obtained seats in advance in one of the parlor cars, and soon they made themselves comfortable. They talked over what had happened while their visitors had been with them, and presently commenced to discuss the expected hunting on and around Snowshoe Island.

"We ought to have a dandy two weeks," was Fred's comment. "Just think of it! For fourteen days we'll be able to do exactly as we please!"

"Yum-yum!" added Randy. "Sleep as long as you please, eat when you please and as much as you please, and shoot all the game you want to! What more could a fellow want?"

"And cut all the firewood you want to! And wash all the dirty dishes you want to! And miss all the really good game you want to——" commenced Andy.

"Jump on him!"

"Throw him out of the window!"

"Let's make him go without his supper to-night!"

So the cries went on as the three others caught Andy by the arms and by the coat collar.

"Hold up! I surrender!" gasped the fun-loving youth. "Let up! will you?"

"You've got to promise to be good and not throw cold water on our hopes," announced Jack. "We're going to have the best time ever on Snowshoe Island. And not a thing is going to happen to mar our pleasure."

But in this last surmise the oldest Rover boy was sadly mistaken. Many things of which he and his cousins did not dream were to occur, not only to startle and annoy them, but also to place them in extreme peril.

CHAPTER XX

CAUGHT IN A SNOWSTORM

"NEXT station stop Rockville!"

"That's our jumping off place, boys! We had better get our baggage together!" exclaimed Jack.

"I wonder if Barney Stevenson will be at the station to meet us?" questioned Fred.

"That depends on whether he got my last message or not," answered Jack. "However, if he isn't there, I guess we can find our way to Snowshoe Island alone."

Soon the long train rolled into the little station at Rockville, and the boys alighted, being assisted by the porter, who had already taken charge of their baggage. He readily accepted the tip they gave him, and, as he had learned that they were off on a little hunting tour, said he hoped they would have every success.

"But don't you bring down too many lions and elephants," added the colored man.

"No, we'll leave the lions and elephants for

you," returned Andy, and this made the porter grin broadly, showing two rows of white ivories.

"Hello, boys! So you've got here at last, eh?" cried a voice from the doorway of the railroad station, and old Barney Stevenson strode toward them. He looked the picture of health, having recovered entirely from the accident in the woods. He shook hands cordially, giving each hand a squeeze that made the recipient wince.

"We're glad to see you, Mr. Stevenson," began Fred, when up went the old lumberman's hand in protest.

"'Twon't do, boys! 'Twon't do at all! If you're going to come over to Snowshoe Island with me, you've got to drop that Mister business. Plain Uncle Barney is good enough for me."

"All right, then! Uncle Barney it is!" answered Fred, and the others smiled and nodded.

"I just got your message this noon," explained the old lumberman. "Billy Sanders, the station agent's son, brought it over to me. I see you've got your duffle with you," and he looked at their various bags.

"We didn't bring anything along in the way of provisions," answered Randy. "We thought we could buy all those things here in town."

"So you can—providing you've got the money, lad;" and Uncle Barney smiled.

"Oh, we've got the money!" answered Andy. "Our folks treated us very handsomely."

"I brought over my big bobsled," went on the old lumberman. "Come ahead—I'll help you carry your baggage. We can leave it all at Crumpers' boathouse until we get the other stuff."

He led the way, and they soon found themselves at the boathouse he had mentioned. Here they placed their traveling bags on Uncle Barney's bobsled, and then made their way to a nearby general store, where the old fellow was well known.

"We've got a list written out here," explained Jack, bringing it forth. "I'll read it to you, and then you can tell me what you think of it."

The list was quite a long one, and the old lumberman listened attentively as Jack read it over. Then he nodded approvingly.

"You've got it about right, boys," he said. "You must have been out before."

"My dad helped me make out this list," explained Dick. "He and my uncles have had quite some experience hunting, and, of course, they knew just what to take along."

"Do you think it will be enough?" questioned Randy anxiously. His appetite for eating never seemed to be lacking.

"You've got enough there for six or eight," answered the old lumberman. "However, it won't do any harm to add a few more beans and a little extra bacon; likewise a little more sugar, seeing as how boys generally like things sweet."

It was an easy matter to purchase the various articles at the general store, and the boys had the clerk pack them securely in several soap boxes. Then Jack, as the treasurer for the crowd, paid the bill.

By this time it was growing dark, and Uncle Barney told them they had better not waste their time.

"I may be mistaken, but it looks a good deal like another snowstorm to me," he explained. "And if it's going to snow, we might as well get to the island before it starts to come down too hard."

The old lumberman was right about the snow, and some early flakes came sifting down while they were still at the boathouse packing the bobsled. The old lumberman showed them how to secure the load so that there would be no danger of its falling off.

"Now then, on with your skates, and we'll be off," he announced. In the winter time he always made the journey between the island and the town on his steel runners.

"I suppose skating is a good deal easier than walking," remarked Fred, while the boys were putting on their skates.

"To be sure. And we can make so much better time."

"How far have we got to go?" questioned Andy.

"To the upper end of the island, where I've got my home, is about four miles."

"Oh, that isn't so far!" cried Fred. "We can skate that in no time."

"We could if we could go in a straight line. But we can't," answered Uncle Barney. "The wind blew the last snow in all sorts of ridges across the ice, and we'll have to pick our way along as best we can."

A long rope had been attached to the bobsled, so that they could all assist in hauling it along. On the smooth ice the load proved to be a light one, so that they had little difficulty in progressing. But, as the old lumberman had said, the ridges of snow on the lake were numerous, and some of these were piled up several feet high, and the party had to make long detours around them.

"This isn't going to be so easy, after all," remarked Fred, after they had skated for almost half an hour. "I thought we would get to Snowshoe Island in no time."

It was now quite dark, and the snow was falling steadily. So far, there had been little wind, but now this, too, sprang up, sending the frozen particles directly into their faces.

"Gee! this isn't so pleasant!" exclaimed Andy, as he pulled down his cap and pulled up the sweater he was wearing.

"The wind is increasing," said Fred a minute later. "Hark to that, will you?"

All listened, and from a distance heard the wind stirring through the woods bordering the lake in that vicinity. Then the wind bore down upon them, and with it came a heavier fall of snow.

"Say, this is going to be some snowstorm!"

"Yes, and some blow too!"

"I wish it wasn't so dark!"

"Uncle Barney, are you sure you know the way?" questioned Randy, as all came to a halt for a moment to turn their backs to the wind and catch their breath.

"Oh, yes, my lad! I know the way well enough," was the old lumberman's reply. "But, believe me, I didn't expect any such snowstorm as this when I went after you. I thought it would be just an ordinary fall."

"It seems to be getting heavier every minute," declared Jack, as he sheltered his eyes with his

hand and tried to peer forth into the darkness. "Why, the snow is coming down in regular chunks!"

The flakes were indeed both heavy and thick, and the wind sent the snow sweeping across the ice, forming new ridges in every direction.

"The first thing you know, we'll be blocked completely," declared Randy, after they had progressed another quarter of a mile. "Just look at that wall of snow, will you?" and he pointed ahead, where a snowdrift was all of five feet high and rapidly growing higher.

The Rovers could see by his manner that the old lumberman was growing much disturbed. He led the way first in one direction and then in another. Then presently he called a halt.

"It ain't no use," he declared flatly. "I thought I could work my way around these snowdrifts, the same as I did when I came over to town after you. But the darkness and this heavy fall of snow is bothering me tremendously."

"What do you think we ought to do?" questioned Fred anxiously. The situation was making the youngest Rover boy a little fearful.

"I guess about the best thing we can do is to strike a bee-line for the island," answered Uncle Barney. "It won't be much harder to break through these snowdrifts than it is to try to find

our way around them in this wind and darkness."

"Are you sure you know the way to the island?" questioned Jack, who knew only too well that it was the easiest thing in the world to get turned around in such a situation as this.

"Oh, I'm pretty sure I haven't lost my bearings," answered the old lumberman. "However, to make sure, maybe I had better have a squint at my compass."

"Oh, say! that puts me in mind!" burst out Randy. "What's the matter with using one of our flashlights?" for the boys had brought along two of those useful articles, which were now packed in the baggage on the bobsled.

"Yes, let's get out both of the flashlights," returned Fred. "In this darkness we'll want all the light we can get."

Sheltering themselves as best they could from the wind, which seemed every minute to be increasing in violence, the boys unstrapped part of their load and managed to bring forth the two flashlights. While this was being done, Uncle Barney brought from his pocket a small compass.

"Now, I think north is in that direction," he said, pointing with his hand. With the aid of one of the lights, the compass was inspected, and it was found that the old lumberman was almost

right, he having pointed a little to the northwest.

"If we'd gone on the way I expected to go, we'd have struck the lower end of the island instead of the upper," he explained. "It wouldn't have made a great deal of difference, but we might as well take the straightest line we know how. Come on! Follow me, and I'll break the way for you."

Once more they started forward, and in a minute more the boys found themselves struggling through snow which was several feet deep.

"Gee! a fellow ought to have snowshoes instead of skates!" panted Fred, when in the midst of the drift. "This is the worst ever!"

"The drift isn't very wide, Fred," announced Jack, who was ahead of his cousin, flashing one of the lights around. "Here we come to the clear ice again," and a few seconds later they found themselves skating along as easily as before.

But this open patch did not last long. Soon they came to several more snowdrifts. The first was barely a foot high, but the second was almost up to their arm-pits. The old lumberman was still ahead, breaking a path for them as well as he was able. Hampered with the load of the bobsled, the boys made slow progress.

"It's no use!" groaned Andy at last. "I'm all out of breath. I've got to stop and rest."

"We had better not stop to rest here, Andy," answered Jack quickly. "We must reach some sort of shelter from this wind."

"I'm all out of breath myself," came from Fred. The exertion of plowing through the snowdrifts had tired him dreadfully, and he was trembling in the legs so that he could scarcely stand.

"Come on, boys! Don't stay here!" called back Uncle Barney to them. "This snowstorm is getting worse every minute!"

The old lumberman had scarcely spoken when all the boys heard a strange whistling in the air. Then the wind tore down upon them harder than ever, sending the snowy particles in all directions, so that to make out what was ahead, even with the flashlights, was out of the question.

CHAPTER XXI

AN ASTONISHING REVELATION

THE situation was certainly a disheartening one, and the boys huddled close together around the bobsled, both for protection and to talk the matter over.

"Can you tell us at all how far we really are from some sort of shelter—I mean the nearest shelter at hand?" questioned Jack of Uncle Barney, as the old lumberman came back to see what had happened.

"It's about a mile to my cabin," was the reply.

"And is that the nearest place?" asked Fred, who had sat down on the bobsled load to rest.

"No. The nearest place is a little hut that I put up at this end of the island several years ago. It isn't very much of a shelter, but it might do."

"Do you mean we could stay there all night?" queried Randy.

"Oh, yes. It's plenty large enough for all of us, and there is a rough fireplace where we could start a blaze and cook something."

"Then let's head for that place, by all means!" cried Jack. "This storm is getting worse every minute."

With the wind whistling keenly in their ears and blowing the snow across the ice and into numerous high drifts, the little party moved on once more, the boys doing their best to keep up with the old lumberman. This was comparatively easy, for even Uncle Barney was well-nigh exhausted by his exertions.

"If this snow keeps on, it will be one of the worst storms we ever had up here," he announced. "But, somehow, I don't think it will last; the sky didn't look heavy enough this afternoon."

"I hope it doesn't last," returned Jack.

"We don't want to be snowed in while we are up here," added Randy. "We want to have a chance to hunt."

To make progress against the fury of the elements was not easy, but presently the boys heard Uncle Barney give a cry of satisfaction.

"Here we are, lads, in sight of the island!" exclaimed the old lumberman. "Now it won't be long before we reach that shelter I mentioned."

By the aid of the two flashlights, the boys made out a number of trees and bushes ahead. The bushes were covered thickly with snow, and behind them were sharp rocks, also outlined in white.

"This is what I call Squirrel Point," explained the old lumberman. "It used to be a great place for squirrels."

"How much further to that shelter?" queried Fred. Just then he took no interest whatever in game. He was so tired he could scarcely place one foot in front of the other; and, to tell the truth, his cousins were little better off.

"We've got only a couple of hundred feet to go," was the reply. "Come ahead. I'll help you pull that bobsled," and now Uncle Barney took hold, and once again they started forward, this time skirting the lower extremity of Snowshoe Island. Here there were a great number of pines and hemlocks growing amid a perfect wilderness of rocks, now all thickly covered with snow.

"Now you'll have a little climbing to do," announced the old lumberman a few minutes later. "You might as well take off your skates, and I'll do the same. And we'll have to hoist that bobsled up the best we know how."

He had turned toward the island, and soon they were climbing up over the rough rocks and pulling the bobsled after them. In one spot they had to raise the sled up over their heads. The old lumberman assisted them in this task, and then pointed to a small, cleared space between a number of pines.

"Hurrah! I see the hut!" cried Jack in delight, and ran forward, followed by his cousins. Uncle Barney came with them, and an instant later had forced open a rude door. Then one of the lights was flashed inside.

The boys and Uncle Barney had expected to find the little cabin vacant. Consequently they were much surprised when they heard a queer little noise, not unlike the snarl of a dog.

"By gum! it's a wolf!" ejaculated the old lumberman in amazement.

Scarcely had he spoken when there leaped into view a full-grown wolf. As he confronted the boys and the old man, he snarled viciously, and his eyes appeared to gleam like two balls of fire.

"It's a wolf, sure enough!"

"Shoot him, somebody! Shoot him!"

"Where's my gun?"

"The guns are all strapped down on the bobsled!"

Such were some of the cries which came from the Rover boys when they found themselves confronted by the wolf. They fell back several paces, and Uncle Barney did likewise. The old lumberman had gone to Rockville armed, but he too had strapped his weapon fast on the bobsled, so that he might assist the boys in hauling the load.

As the little party fell back wondering what

was best to do, the wolf gave another leap, thereby reaching the doorway of the little cabin. Then, with a snarl, he whirled around, leaped into the snow behind some hemlocks, and in a moment more had disappeared from view.

"Well, what do you know about that!" cried Fred faintly.

"And to think we weren't ready to shoot!" groaned Randy.

"We're a fine bunch of hunters, we are!" scoffed Andy.

"Well, we didn't expect to find a wolf in possession of this hut," remarked Jack. "Just the same, I wish we had been able to get a shot at him," he added wistfully.

"I should have carried my gun," remarked Uncle Barney. "It was a mistake to put it on the sled. That's just my luck, confound it! Whenever I go out free-handed, I'm almost certain to see something worth shooting," and he shook his head grimly.

"You didn't say anything about wolves being on the island," said Fred, while the old man was looking around inside the cabin with both flashlights.

"There are very few wolves in this neighborhood," was the reply. "The last wolf I saw on the island, outside of this one, was two years ago."

As the door to the cabin had been closed, the boys wondered how the wolf had gotten into the place, but Uncle Barney showed them a small, broken-out window in the rear of the shelter. This window was now partly covered with snow.

"I suppose the wolf thought he couldn't get out that way on account of the snow, and consequently he had to come by way of the door," explained the old lumberman. "Well, I'm mighty glad he didn't go any damage."

An examination revealed the fact that no other living thing was in or around the cabin, and as soon as they were satisfied of this, the boys brought in the bobsled. In the meantime, Uncle Barney stirred around outside and managed to find some firewood which was fairly dry. Then a blaze was started in the rude fireplace, the door was shut, and a blanket was nailed up over the broken-out window.

"Now this is something like!" remarked Jack, when the cabin began to grow warm. The boys had unpacked the contents of the bobsled and brought forth a candle, which was lighted and placed in a rude holder on the wall.

Now that they were safe from the storm, all of the Rovers felt in better humor. Uncle Barney showed them how they could obtain water by melting some snow and ice, and soon they

had enough to make a pot of chocolate and another pot of coffee. In the meantime, the old lumberman, assisted by Jack, opened up a box of sardines fried some bacon, and also warmed up a can of green corn which had been among the stores. They had no bread, so they used up one of the boxes of soda crackers which they had purchased.

"It's too bad we haven't got some game to cook," observed Randy.

"Let's be thankful that we've got some sort of a roof over our heads, and that we can rest," put in Fred. He had not yet gotten over the struggle to get through the snow.

With nothing else to do, the boys and the old lumberman took their time over the evening meal, and never had anything tasted better than did this first supper on Snowshoe Island to the Rovers.

Outside the wind was blowing as strongly as ever, and the snow still came down steadily. To make sure that they would not suffer from the cold, all of the lads went out with Uncle Barney and brought in a large supply of firewood. Then they built up a good blaze, around which they sat in a semicircle on the sled and the boxes brought along, and on a rude bench of which the little cabin boasted.

"When I first came to Snowshoe Island, twelve years ago, I thought I would locate at this

end," remarked Barney Stevenson during the course of the conversation. "But after staying here a short while I concluded that it was nicer at the upper end, so I went there."

"Did you buy the island as far back as that?" queried Jack.

"Oh, no, lad. In those days I only leased the island. You see, it belonged to an old lady named Martinson. She had a son who drifted out to California, and then went to Alaska. When the old lady died, Luke Martinson came back home, and then he came to see me. He wanted to get rid of all his property around here so he could go back to Alaska, and he offered this place to me, and I bought it. That was several years ago."

"It's nice to own an island like this," observed Fred. "A fellow can have a regular Robinson Crusoe time of it if he wants to."

"When I bought the island I thought I'd have no difficulty in holding it," continued Barney Stevenson. "But since that time I have had a whole lot of trouble. Two men claim that Luke Martinson never had any rights here—that the old Martinson claim to the island was a false one. They have tried two or three times to get me off the place, but I've refused to go."

"Didn't you get a deed to the island?" questioned Jack, who had often heard his father and

his uncles speak about deeds to real estate.

"Certainly, I got a deed! But they claim that the old Martinson deed was no good. But it is good—and I know it!" grumbled Uncle Barney.

"Who are the men who want to take the island away from you?" questioned Andy. "Some hunters around here, or lumbermen?"

"Oh no! They are two men from the city—a real estate dealer and a man who used to be interested in buying and selling property, but who lost most of his fortune and then went to teaching, or something like that."

"Teaching!" exclaimed Jack, struck by a sudden idea. "What is that man's name, if I may ask?"

"His name is Asa Lemm, and the name of the other man is Slogwell Brown," was the reply of the old lumberman, which filled the Rover boys with amazement.

CHAPTER XXII

THE FIRST NIGHT ON THE ISLAND

"Asa Lemm and Slogwell Brown!"

"What do you know about that, boys?"

"That's bringing this matter pretty close to us, isn't it?"

"I should say so!"

Such were some of the remarks coming from the Rover boys after Barney Stevenson had made his astonishing declaration that the father of Slugger Brown and the ex-teacher of Colby Hall were the two men who were trying to dispossess him.

"Why, you speak as if you knew those two men!" exclaimed the old lumberman.

"We certainly know Asa Lemm," answered Jack.

"And we know the son of Slogwell Brown," added Randy.

"Yes, and if Mr. Brown is no better than his son, I wouldn't put it past him to do something crooked," was Andy's comment.

"Tell me what you know," said Uncle Barney.

Thereupon the four boys related the particulars of the trouble they had had with Professor Lemm, and of how he had left the military academy. They also told much about Slugger, and, incidentally, Nappy Martell, and of how the two cadets had been dismissed by Colonel Colby.

"This certainly is wonderful!" exclaimed the old lumberman, when they had finished. "I had no idea you boys knew anything about those men. I reckon your opinion of their honesty is just about as high as mine is," and he smiled grimly.

Asa Lemm claims to have lost quite a fortune," said Jack; "but we certainly did not think that part of it was located in this island."

"It isn't located in this island—at least it isn't so far as I am concerned!" cried Uncle Barney. "If those men bought what they thought were the rights to this island, they were defrauded, that's all! And that has absolutely nothing to do with my rights to this land!"

"I should think if you got a good deed to the land from that Luke Martinson—and his folks had a good deed from somebody else—that ought to be proof enough that you own the island."

"Well, I've got the deed from Martinson, and I've got the old deeds he used to have, too! I've got them placed away in a tin box and in a safe place, too!" answered the old man.

"Then, if you've got those deeds, why do they bother you?" questioned Fred.

"As I've said before, they won't admit that the deeds old Mrs. Martinson had were any good. The fact of the matter is, Slogwell Brown wants to get those deeds away from me. He has been at me to let him look at the deeds several times, but I've always refused, for I was afraid that if he got the deeds away from me I would never see them again."

"I thought they recorded deeds at the Court House," said Jack, who had heard this fact mentioned between his father and his uncles.

"They do record deeds, and I suppose that one was recorded at some time or other; but the Court House in this county was burnt down some years ago and all the records went up in smoke."

"But you could get the deeds recorded now—I mean have it done over again," remarked Randy.

"I suppose so. But that wouldn't do me any good, because they would probably try to prove that the deeds I brought in were not the originals. You see, the date when a deed is recorded has a good deal to do with it. Anyway, I'm not going to let anybody have those deeds until I am sure of what I'm doing," went on Uncle Barney. It was easy to see that the old man was peculiar and wanted to do things in his own manner.

"Did you ever ask a lawyer about this?" questioned Fred.

"No! I ain't got no use for lawyers!" was the quick reply. "I hired a lawyer in a lawsuit nigh on to thirteen years ago, and I lost the suit and it cost me over a hundred dollars more than I might have paid otherwise." The old lumberman did not add that this was a lawsuit to which Ruth Stevenson's father was also a party, yet such was the fact.

"How long is it since you heard from Mr. Brown and Professor Lemm?" asked Andy.

"The last time they came to see me was in the middle of the summer. They threatened all sorts of things, and they got me so mad that I had to take down my shotgun and warn them away. Then they left in a big hurry."

"Don't you think it's a bad thing to warn them off with a gun?" questioned Jack. "They might have you arrested for threatening their lives."

"I'm not afraid of them!" was the quick reply. "This is my island, and nobody shall take it away from me!"

The boys could see that the subject was becoming distasteful to the old man, and so they started to speak of other things. They questioned him about how they could get to his regular cabin,

and also the cabin they were to occupy, and then spoke about the game they might have a chance to bring down.

"Your going hunting will depend a good deal on how the weather turns out," said the old lumberman. "If this snow keeps on for a day or two, it will make traveling pretty bad. However, I'm in hopes that the storm will clear away by morning."

The boys had put in a strenuous day, and they were glad enough when Uncle Barney suggested that they turn in for the night.

"We're pretty short on blankets," he said, "but that won't matter so much so long as we keep the fire going. I've got a good back log started, and that ought to last until morning, if not longer. When I'm at this hut alone, I usually sleep in that corner, and I'll do the same to-night. You can spread yourselves around as you please."

With such a limited supply of blankets, it was no easy matter to make comfortable couches, yet the boys had left home to rough it, so nobody complained. They lay down in their clothing, using some of their suitcases and Gladstone bags for pillows.

"If we had had a chance to do so, we might have brought in some pine boughs to lie on," said Jack. "But as it is, I guess we'll manage."

"Is there any chance of that wolf coming back?" questioned Fred, a bit anxiously.

"I hardly think so, Fred. And, anyway, I don't see how he's going to get in here, with the door closed and the blanket nailed over the window. However, we can keep our guns handy in case he does appear."

Worn out so completely, it did not take the boys long to fall into a sound sleep, and the old lumberman soon joined them, snoring lustily. Thus the night passed, and nothing came to disturb them.

Of the lads, it was Randy who was the first to arise in the morning. He found Uncle Barney in the act of stirring up the fire. The old lumberman had already brought in some ice to be melted for a pot of coffee.

"I ain't really awake in the morning until after I've had my cup of coffee," he explained. "That's the one thing that really sets me on my feet."

"How about the storm?" questioned Randy, and now the sound of his voice set the others to stirring.

"The storm is about over," was the welcome announcement. "In a little while I think you'll see the sun peeping out over the woods on the eastern shore."

"Hurrah! that's good news!" cried Andy, leap-

ing to his feet and stretching himself. "I must have a look!" and, jamming his cap on his head, he started for the door. The other Rovers followed him.

Outside they found the snow covering everything to a depth of from several inches to several feet, but the air was as clear as a bell, and just beyond the woods, on the eastern shore of Lake Monona, there was a rosy glow, betokening the rising of the sun.

"It's going to be a grand day!" exclaimed Fred.

"I don't think it could be any better, even though the snow is quite deep in spots," returned Jack.

Once more they went over the stores which had been brought along, and took out enough for breakfast. They had with them some flour for griddle cakes, and soon the appetizing odor of the cakes, mingling with the aroma of hot coffee and hot chocolate, filled the little cabin. Then they took turns at frying bacon and making more griddle cakes and eating breakfast.

"What do you think will be the easiest way of getting to the other end of the island?" questioned Jack of Uncle Barney, while they were eating.

"Well, as you've got the bobsled and all those stores along, I should say the easiest way would

be to climb down to the lake again," was the reply. "That wind must have cleaned off some of the ice, and we can get along a good deal better by skating and by hauling the bobsled over the ice than we can trying to break our way through the woods in this heavy fall of snow."

"I was thinking if we walked the length of the island we might stir up some game," remarked Randy.

"You'll have plenty of chances to go out after game after you're settled at the regular camp," returned the old lumberman. "The game isn't going to run away, you know," and he smiled pleasantly.

Breakfast at an end, the boys lost no time in repacking their belongings, and Uncle Barney assisted them in fastening the load to the bobsled.

"But I'm going to carry my shotgun this time," announced Fred. "Then, if any game appears, I'll be ready for it."

"You can all carry your guns if you want to," said the owner of the island. "I'll leave my weapon strapped to the sled, so that if any game appears you boys can do the shooting."

The little cabin was closed up, and then the party made its way down over the rough rocks and between the trees to the lake shore. It was no easy matter to bring the bobsled along, and

once Fred slipped on one of the smooth rocks and pitched headlong into a snowbank.

"Hi you! stop your fooling!" cried Andy, and then, in great glee, he picked up a chunk of snow and hurled it at Jack.

"Let up!" cried the oldest Rover boy. "This is no time for jokes!" and then, as Andy came at him with another chunk of snow, he jumped at his cousin, put out his foot, and made the fun-loving youth measure his length in a drift.

"Wow! but that snow is cold!" cried Andy, who had gotten some down the sleeves of his sweater. "Stop! Don't bury me! I'll be good!" And then he scrambled to his feet once more, while Fred did the same. Then the whole party proceeded on its way.

Reaching the lake, they lost no time in putting on their skates, and then, with Uncle Barney leading the way, the four Rovers followed, dragging the loaded bobsled behind them.

On all sides could be seen snowdrifts and ridges of snow piled in curiously fantastic shapes. But the keen wind of the afternoon and night had cleared many long reaches of the ice, and over these reaches Uncle Barney picked his way, gradually working closer and closer to the upper end of Snowshoe Island.

"We'll turn in here," he announced presently,

when they came to where there was something of a cove. "There seems to be quite a cleared space. It won't be very long now before we reach the upper end."

As they turned in once more toward the island, Jack noticed a peculiar fluttering among some trees not far away.

"Wait a minute!" he cried out in a low tone. "I think I see some game!"

All came to a halt, and then Uncle Barney looked in the direction to which the oldest Rover boy pointed.

"You are right, my lad," answered the old lumberman. "There is a fine chance for all of you."

"What are they?" questioned Fred a trifle excitedly.

"Wild turkeys! And the best kind of eating—if you can only get close enough to bring them down."

CHAPTER XXIII

UNEXPECTED VISITORS

"Oh, say! we've got to bring down at least one of those wild turkeys!" cried Andy.

"Keep quiet," admonished Jack, speaking in a whisper. "If those turkeys hear you they'll be gone in a jiffy."

"I didn't know there were any wild turkeys around here," remarked Randy. "I thought they had been all cleaned out long ago."

"They are getting very scarce," answered Uncle Barney, "but once in a while you will see a small flock of them. I was after that flock about a week ago, but they got away from me. I've a notion that it's about the last flock in this district."

While this talk was going on in low tones of voice, all of the Rovers had abandoned the bob-sled and were moving toward the shore of the island.

"You had better come this way and crawl up in the shelter of yonder rocks and brushwood," advised Uncle Barney. "And don't shoot until

you have a good aim and know what you're shooting at," he concluded.

It must be admitted that all of the boys were somewhat excited over the prospect ahead. They caught only a brief glance at the game, but felt certain that it was close at hand.

"Wild turkeys are a good sight better than rabbits or squirrels, or even pheasants," said Fred. "They'll make dandy eating."

"Don't eat them until after you have shot them, Fred," remarked Andy dryly.

"Hush," warned Jack. "Now, make as little noise as possible, and each of you hold his gun ready for use."

They had not stopped to take off their skates, but this was unnecessary, for the snow was deep and the skates merely kept them from slipping. They pushed on around some large rocks, and then in between the thick brushwood, where the snow fell upon their heads and shoulders, covering them with white—something which was to their advantage, as it aided them in hiding themselves from the game. Not far away they could hear the wild turkeys, one in particular giving the peculiar gobble by which they are well known.

"I see them," whispered Fred a minute later, and pointed with his gun.

There in a little clearing some distance ahead

was a tall and long turkey gobbler surrounded by a number of hens. They were plump and of a peculiar black and bronzed color.

"Let's all fire together. Maybe we can bring down the whole flock!" exclaimed Randy, and his manner showed that he was growing quite excited.

"All right—I'm willing," answered Jack. "But let us see if we can't get a little nearer first."

"Maybe if we try to get closer they'll get away from us," said Andy.

"Keep your guns pointed at them, and if they start to leave fire as quickly as you can," answered Jack, and then he moved forward with his cousins ranged on either side of him.

The Rover boys had advanced but a few paces when the wild turkeys caught sight of them. The turkey cock issued a loud note of alarm, and all started to fly from the low bushes upon which they had been resting.

"Fire!" yelled Jack, and discharged his rifle.

The crack of this weapon was followed by the report of Fred's shotgun, and then the twins also let drive. Then Fred fired again, and so did some of the others.

At the first report the turkey cock was seen to rise in the air, followed by some of the hens, while two hens dropped lifeless in the snow. The tur-

key cock, however, was seriously wounded and fluttered around in a circle.

"Give him another shot!" yelled Fred, whose gun was empty; and thereupon Jack and Randy fired and the gobbler fell directly at their feet. He was not yet dead, but they quickly put him out of his misery by wringing his neck. By this time the hens which had flown away were out of sight.

"Two hens and one gobbler!" cried Jack, as he surveyed the game. "I think we can congratulate ourselves on this haul."

"You certainly can!" exclaimed Uncle Barney, as he plowed up behind the boys. "Wild turkeys are no mean game to bring down, let me tell you! I've tried time and again to get a turkey, and somehow or other it would always get away from me."

"Some size to this gobbler!" remarked Fred. "And some weight, too," he added, as he picked the turkey cock up by the legs.

"He'll weigh sixteen or eighteen pounds at least," said the old lumberman, as he took the turkey cock from the youngest Rover boy and held the game out in both hands. "Yes, sir! every bit of eighteen—and he may go twenty. You'll have a dandy meal off of him."

"I know what I'd like to do," said Randy wistfully. "I'd like to send him home to the folks."

"That's the talk!" returned his twin. "Why can't we do it?"

"I'm willing," answered Jack. "The express company ought to know how to pack game like that so it will carry properly."

"They'll pack anything you want them to down at the railroad station," said Uncle Barney. "There is a man there who makes a specialty of that sort of thing for hunters. He'll see that the turkey reaches your folks in New York in first-class shape."

"We can send the gobbler home and keep the two hens," said Fred. "That will make eating enough for us, I'm sure. They must weigh at least seven or eight pounds apiece."

"All of that," came from the old lumberman.

Much elated over the success of their first effort at hunting on Snowshoe Island, the Rovers picked up the game and made their way back to where they had left the bobsled. They placed the turkeys on the sled, and then resumed their journey once more.

"We're coming up to the end of the island now," announced Barney Stevenson presently, and a minute later they made a turn around some trees lining the shore and came into view of a cleared spot, containing a small boat-landing. Beyond the cleared spot, backed up by some tall pines and

hemlocks, were two fair-sized cabins, standing about a hundred feet apart.

"That's the cabin I use," explained the old lumberman, pointing to the building on the right. "The other is the one you can make yourselves at home in."

The setting for the two cabins was an ideal one, and the boys could well imagine how beautiful the place must look in the summer time with the green trees, and the cleared space sloping down to the great lake. Now, of course, the ground, as well as the trees and brushwood, was heavily covered with snow, and the snow hung down off the rough roof of each cabin.

"I'll take you directly over to the cabin you are to occupy," said Uncle Barney. "I've got it all in shape for you, with plenty of firewood and everything."

He led the way, and they followed, dragging the bobsled behind them. The door to the cabin had been locked, for the old lumberman stated that he did not wish any outside hunters or other people to take possession during his absence.

"Of course, a good many of the hunters and lumberman are my friends," he explained. "But then there are often strangers, and some of those fellows wouldn't be above carrying off anything that suited their fancy."

The boys gave cries of delight when he took them into the cabin which they were to occupy during their stay on the island. They found it a fairly large place, divided into two rooms, one a general living-room and the other a sleeping apartment. In the former was located a fairly well-made table, a couple of benches, and also a swinging shelf, containing quite an assortment of dishes, while at one side there was a big open fireplace, and in a corner a small closet furnished with numerous kitchen utensils.

The other apartment contained three regular bunks and a temporary one put in for the occasion; and these bunks were well spread with fresh pine boughs and camp blankets. The opening from one room into the next was so located that the warmth from the fire in the living-room could easily reach the sleeping apartment.

"Say, this is bang-up!" exclaimed Randy.

"It's the best ever!" echoed Fred.

"It's a peach!" was Andy's comment.

"I certainly didn't expect anything half as good as this, Uncle Barney," remarked Jack, his eyes showing his pleasure. "If we don't have a good time here, it certainly won't be your fault."

"Then you really like it, do you, boys?" asked the old lumberman anxiously.

"I certainly don't know how it could be better,"

remarked Randy. "And just look at the dishes and things to cook with!"

"And these fine bunks!" exclaimed his twin, sitting down on one. "Why, this is just as good as a hair mattress!"

"And how sweet the pine boughs smell!" murmured Fred.

"If you boys want to send that turkey cock home, you had better let me take it down to Rockville to-day," said the old lumberman. "I won't mind the trip at all," he added, as he saw that some of them were going to remonstrate. "Fact is, I forgot to get some of the things I was going to buy yesterday. So if you'll just make yourselves at home here, I'll go down there and be back some time before nightfall."

"Don't you want to wait until after dinner?" questioned Jack.

"No. I'll get something to eat while I'm in town."

The matter was talked over, and it was finally arranged that Barney Stevenson should return to Rockville with the turkey cock and have it shipped by express to the Rover boys' folks in New York. Jack wrote out a card, which was to be sent with the game, and also another card to be tacked on the box in which it was to be shipped. Then the old lumberman hurried over

to his own cabin to get ready for the journey.

"Won't our folks be surprised when they get that box!" exclaimed Fred. "I wish I could be there to see them."

"They'll know we didn't lose any time going hunting," added Andy, with a happy laugh.

When the old hunter had departed with the turkey cock, the boys hung up the dead hens and then proceeded to make themselves at home in the cabin which had been assigned to them. They had quite something to do to build a fire and to unpack and stow away the various things which they had brought along, and almost before they were aware it was time for dinner.

"Shall we eat the game to-day?" questioned Randy.

"Oh, let us wait until to-morrow. Then Uncle Barney will be with us, and he can enjoy it, too," answered Jack, and so it was decided. Then the boys started in to get such a meal as their stores and the things which the old lumberman had turned over to them provided.

It was great fun, and all of them felt in the best of spirits. Andy could hardly keep himself down, and had to whistle at the top of his lungs, and even do a jig or two while he moved about.

"It's going to be the best outing ever!" he declared over and over again.

"Yes, and won't we have something to tell when we get back to Colby Hall!" put in Fred.

It was over an hour later before dinner was ready. Having had such an early breakfast, the boys did full justice to all the things they had cooked, and they spent quite some time over the meal. After that they continued to put the cabin in order, and cleaned their skates, and also looked over their guns.

"We'll have to try these snowshoes to-morrow," announced Jack, referring to a number of such articles which Barney Stevenson had hung on the walls of the cabin. "Maybe we'll almost break our necks at first, but there is nothing like getting used to a thing."

"What do you mean? Getting used to breaking your neck?" questioned Andy dryly, and this brought forth a laugh all around.

About the middle of the afternoon the boys found themselves with but little to do, and Fred suggested that they might go out and look for more game.

"Oh, let's take it easy for the rest of the day, and go out early in the morning," cried Randy.

"Let us go over to the other cabin and take a look around," suggested Andy. "I'm sure old Uncle Barney won't mind. He's a fine old gentleman, even though he is rather peculiar."

"I want to talk to him about Ruth Stevenson's folks some time," said Jack; "but I'm afraid I'm going to have a hard time getting at it."

Andy led the way out of the cabin, and the four boys had almost reached the place used by the old lumberman when suddenly Fred gave a cry.

"Here come two men from the lake!"

"Maybe it's Uncle Barney coming back with one of his friends," said Andy.

"No; neither of the men walks like the old lumberman," announced his twin.

"One of those men looks familiar to me," burst out Jack. He gazed intently at the advancing pair.

"There are two others behind them," broke in Fred. "Young fellows, I think."

"One of those men is Professor Lemm!" cried Jack.

"And the two fellows in the rear are Slugger Brown and Nappy Martell!" added Fred.

CHAPTER XXIV

A WAR OF WORDS

THE knowledge that Professor Lemm, Slugger Brown and Nappy Martell were approaching the cabins on the upper end of Snowshoe Island filled the Rover boys with wonder.

"Professor Lemm must have come to see Uncle Barney about those deeds," remarked Randy.

"I wonder if that is Slugger's father with him?" broke in Fred.

"Maybe," answered Jack. "Those men were the only two who were interested in getting possession of this island."

"I'll tell you what I think we ought to do!" exclaimed Andy.

"What?" came from the others quickly.

"I think we ought to go back to our own cabin and arm ourselves."

"That might not be such a bad idea, Andy," returned Jack. "Those men, backed up by Slugger and Nappy, may want to carry things with a high hand."

Acting on Andy's suggestion, the four boys retreated to the cabin which they had just left, and each took possession of his weapon.

"I don't think they'll try much rough-house work when they see how we are armed," remarked Randy grimly.

"Of course, we don't want to do any shooting," cautioned Jack. "We only want to scare them, in case they go too far."

"Jack, you had better be the spokesman for the crowd," remarked Randy. "You go ahead and talk to them, and we'll stand back with our guns."

Still holding his rifle, Jack went forward again, and in a moment more found himself confronted by Asa Lemm and the man who was with him.

"Rover! Is it possible!" exclaimed the former teacher of Colby Hall in astonishment. "What are you doing here?"

"I and my cousins are here to hunt."

"Humph! I didn't know old Stevenson allowed anybody to do hunting around here."

"Maybe they are hunting here without the old man's permission," suggested the other man. "Where is Barney Stevenson?" he demanded of Jack.

"Mr. Stevenson has gone over to Rockville on an errand," was the reply.

By this time Slugger and Nappy had come up,

and they stared at Jack and his cousins as if they could not believe the evidences of their senses.

"Well, what do you know about this!" burst out the former bully of Colby Hall.

"All of those Rovers up here, and armed!" came from Nappy.

"Who gave you the right to come to this island?" went on the bully, glaring at Jack.

"Do you know these boys?" queried the man who was with Professor Lemm.

"Sure, Dad, I know them! They are the Rover boys I told you about—the fellows who helped to have me and Nappy sent away from school."

"Oh, so that's it!" cried Slogwell Brown. "Did you have any idea they might be up here?" he questioned quickly.

"Not the least, Dad. I thought they were down in New York. Nappy said he had seen them on the ice in Central Park."

"I did see them, too," answered the lad mentioned.

"Well, we didn't come here to see you Rovers," broke in Asa Lemm stiffly. "Not but what I have an account to settle with you," he continued significantly.

"We want nothing more to do with you, Professor Lemm," answered Jack boldly.

"But I'm going to have something to do with

you, young man!" stormed the former teacher of the Hall, beginning to show his usual ill humor.

"Never mind these boys now, Lemm," interposed Slogwell Brown. "We want to fix up our business with old Stevenson first."

"If you have anything to say to Mr. Stevenson, you'll have to come when he is here," answered Jack.

"When do you expect him back?"

"I don't know exactly when he will come—probably before nightfall."

"Then, all we can do is to wait for him," grumbled Slogwell Brown.

"If we have to wait, we might as well go inside his cabin and do it," suggested Nappy. "It's too cold to stay out here."

"Yes, and I'm all tired out from wading through those snowdrifts," added Slugger. He looked past Jack at the other Rover boys. "Had any luck hunting?"

For the moment there was no reply. Then Randy stepped forward.

"I don't know as that is any of your business, Slugger," he replied coldly.

"Oh, say! you needn't get on your high-horse," growled the bully. "What Nappy and I ought to do is to pitch into you for having us fired out of the Hall."

"You stay right where you are!" cried Fred.

"Humph! you think you've got the best of us with those guns, don't you?" came from Nappy, who had ranged up beside Slugger.

"Never mind what we think," answered Andy. "If you know when you're well off, you'll keep your distance."

"See here! you boys needn't get too fresh," came harshly from Slogwell Brown. "I've heard all about your doings at Colby Hall, and how you got the professor, here, and my son and his chum into trouble. Some day I intend to make you suffer for that. But just now we are here on a different errand."

"We're going to put old Stevenson off this island and take possession!" cried Nappy triumphantly. "And then, when he goes, you can go, too!"

"Why cannot we take possession of these two cabins at once?" suggested Asa Lemm. "The island belongs to us, and we have a perfect right to do so."

"Of course we can take possession," answered Slogwell Brown. "Remember—possession is nine points of the law," he added, in a low tone of voice.

"We'll show old Stevenson where he belongs," growled Slugger.

"Yes, and we'll show these Rover boys where they belong, too," put in Nappy, his eyes snapping viciously.

Without further ado, the whole party started toward the cabin which was Barney Stevenson's home. Evidently the men had been there before, and knew that this was the right building of the two.

"Oh, Jack! are you going to let them take possession?" questioned Fred, in a low voice.

"What do you fellows think we ought to do?" queried the oldest Rover boy quickly.

"I think we ought to make them keep out until Uncle Barney gets back," answered Randy.

"That's my idea, too," added his twin.

"They may have the right to this island, but I'd make them fight it out with Mr. Stevenson," was Fred's comment.

"That's just the way I look at it, too," answered Jack. "Come on, Randy; we'll guard that cabin while Andy and Fred can remain here to guard this place."

"Would you dare to shoot at them?" questioned Fred anxiously.

"I don't think there will be any necessity for shooting, Fred. I think if we merely show we mean business they will keep their distance."

The boys exchanged a few more words, and

then Jack and Randy set off on a run for the cabin occupied by Uncle Barney. They outdistanced the visitors, and soon placed themselves in the doorway.

"Now, you keep back!" cried Jack warningly. "Don't come near this place until Mr. Stevenson returns!"

"Ha! do you dare to threaten me?" burst out Slogwell Brown in amazement.

"You heard what I said."

"Every one of you keep away from here," put in Randy.

"See here, Rover!" commenced Asa Lemm. "This is outrageous! We own this island, and we intend to take possession."

"Whether you own it or not, you are not going to take possession of anything until after Mr. Stevenson gets here," answered Jack, as calmly as he could. "I don't know anything about your claim. As far as I do know, Mr. Stevenson is the owner of this place. He left us in charge when he went away, and we are going to remain in charge until he gets back."

"Huh! do you think we're going to stay out in this cold?" grumbled Slugger.

"I don't care what you do," answered Jack. "You can't come into either of these cabins—and that's final!"

"We'll see about that!" stormed Nappy, and advanced several steps.

"Get back there," ordered Jack sternly, and made a movement as if to raise his rifle.

"Stop! Stop! Don't shoot!" yelled Asa Lemm, in sudden fright. "Keep back, boys, or they'll certainly shoot at us!" and he began to retreat.

"Do you dare to threaten us?" questioned Slogwell Brown and the tone of his voice showed his uneasiness. A glance over his shoulder had shown him the other two boys at the doorway of the second cabin, and also armed.

"I'm telling you to keep away from here—that's all," answered Jack. "You can come back when Mr. Stevenson returns."

"I—I think maybe it would be better for us to retire," stammered Professor Lemm. "We—er—don't want to run the risk of being shot. Those boys are very hot-headed, and there is no telling what they might do if we exasperated them."

"I'm not going to give in to a bunch of school boys!" stormed Slogwell Brown, who, in his manner, was every bit as much of a bully as his son.

"But if they should shoot at us——"

"I don't think they've got the nerve to do it. They are only putting up a big bluff."

"Don't you be too sure about that," put in Nappy, who was just as much scared as was the professor. "Those Rover boys are game to do almost anything when they are aroused."

"We've got to remember one thing," came from Slugger. "There are four of them, and each of 'em has got a gun."

"I wish I had brought a gun along myself," said his crony.

"We should have armed ourselves," grumbled Slogwell Brown. "It was a mistake to come over to this island without so much as a pistol. If I only had some sort of a weapon, I'd show those boys a thing or two."

"Maybe we can get into the cabin by a back way," suggested Nappy.

"Say, that's an idea!" cried his crony. "And if we can do that, maybe there's a gun or a pistol inside that we can use."

"You boys can take a walk around to the rear if you want to," answered Slugger's father. "I'll see if I can't bluff those fellows into letting us in at the front."

Slugger and Nappy had just started to move away toward the lake shore, intending to sneak behind some rocks and bushes, when they heard Fred give a loud shout from the entrance to the second cabin. Then Andy gave a long whistle.

"What's that for?" questioned Nappy quickly.

"See! they are waving their hands to somebody," announced Slugger. He turned to gaze out over the lake. "A man is coming."

"What do you bet it isn't old Stevenson?"

"It it! See, he's coming as fast as he can!"

"Yes, and he has his gun with him," announced Asa Lemm somewhat feebly.

Attracted by the call from Fred and the loud whistle given by Andy, the old lumberman had noted that a number of visitors were standing in front of the two cabins at the upper end of Snowshoe Island. He was still a considerable distance out on the lake, but his rapid skate strokes soon brought him to the shore. Then, without waiting to unstrap his skates, he came forward through the snow, his shotgun ready for use.

"Well, I'm mighty glad he's got here," murmured Jack, and his cousins echoed the sentiment.

CHAPTER XXV

FACING THE WOLVES

"So this is how you treat me, eh?" exclaimed old Barney Stevenson, as he confronted the visitors. "Come here to do as you please while I'm away, eh?" and his face showed his intense displeasure.

"They wanted to go into your cabin, but we wouldn't let them do it while you were away," said Jack quickly.

"Good for you, boys—I'm glad you kept 'em out."

"See here, Stevenson, this nonsense has got to end!" cried Slogwell Brown. "You know as well as I do that you have no valid claim to this island."

"The island belongs to me, Brown, and I intend to keep it!" was the quick reply. "I've got my deed for it."

"That deed is no good, and you know it," broke in Asa Lemm.

"Look here! if you are so sure that Mr. Steven-

son is in the wrong, why don't you go to law about it?" questioned Jack, struck by a sudden idea.

"See here, boy, this is none of your affair," growled Slogwell Brown. "We'll conduct our own business in our own way."

"And I'll conduct my own business in my own way, too!" interposed Uncle Barney. "You get off of this island—all of you—just as quick as you can," and he started as if to raise his gun.

"Now, see here, Stevenson——" began Slogwell Brown.

"We have rights——" came from Asa Lemm.

"I've listened to you before. I'm not going to listen again!" interrupted the old lumberman. "You haven't any right on this island, and I'm ordering you—every one of you—to get off just as soon as you can. You're trespassers—nothing else!" and now he raised his gun as if getting ready to shoot.

"Come on, let us go back!" cried Professor Lemm in sudden terror, and he retreated several steps, followed by Slugger and Nappy.

"See here, Stevenson, you'll be sorry for this some day," growled Slogwell Brown. He had still too much of the fight left in him to retreat, and yet he was not brave enough to advance.

"I'll take my chances!" returned Uncle Bar-

ney. "I've got those deeds, and I know they are all O. K. Now, you clear out—and don't you dare to come here again!"

"Why won't you let me see those deeds?" questioned the other man.

"Because I won't—that's why!"

"I came on purpose to look them over and show you your mistake."

"Maybe he hasn't got any deeds," came from Nappy, who had fallen back still further.

"I've got those deeds safe and sound—in a box —and put away where you fellows can't find 'em!" answered the old lumberman triumphantly. "Now you get out! I'll give you just five minutes to do it in. Jack, you time 'em, will you?" and he glanced at the oldest Rover boy.

"Sure, I will!" was the ready reply, and Jack pulled out his watch. "It's now exactly twelve minutes past four."

"All right. Then you've got until seventeen minutes after four to get off of this island," announced Barney Stevenson to the visitors. "If you are not off by that time, there'll most likely be some shooting around here."

He had taken his place in front of his cabin, and all of the boys were now ranged beside him. As each was armed, they made quite a formidable looking firing squad.

Much against his will, Slogwell Brown retreated to where Professor Lemm and the others of the crowd stood. The four talked matters over in a low tone.

"It's too bad we came here unarmed," grumbled Slogwell Brown.

"That's just what I say, Dad!" answered his son. "Let's go back and get some guns and pistols."

"No! no! We don't want any shooting!" cried Asa Lemm in new alarm.

"I'm not going to get mixed up in any gunplay," added Nappy.

"If we could only get possession of those deeds!" went on the former teacher of Colby Hall.

"I've got a plan," suggested Nappy, after a moment's pause. "Come on, let's go away now, and I'll tell you what it is."

Growling and grumbling, the four visitors made their way slowly to the lake shore. As they skated off, Slugger Brown turned to shake his first at the Rovers, and Nappy did likewise.

"Well, they've gone!" exclaimed Fred, and his voice showed his relief.

"But there's no telling when they'll come back," said Randy quickly.

"I don't think they'll come back in a hurry,"

broke in Andy. "We scared them pretty thoroughly with our guns."

"What did they say to you before I came?" questioned Uncle Barney, while the party on the lake was disappearing in the gloom.

Thereupon the boys related the particulars of all that had taken place, the old lumberman listening closely to the recital. At the end, he shut his teeth and shook his head grimly.

"The rascals!" he ejaculated. "If it hadn't been for you, they would most likely have ranracked both of the cabins, and maybe, if they had gotten hold of my extra gun or my pistol, taken possession and made me keep away."

"Oh, they would have taken possession all right enough!" cried Jack. "But if the island is really yours, Uncle Barney, I don't see why you couldn't have had them arrested for anything like that."

"I told you before—I have no use for lawyers or law courts," grumbled the old lumberman. "All I want to do is to stay here and not be disturbed. I've got my deeds, and that's enough."

"Are you sure they are in a safe place?" questioned Jack. "I mean, some place where those rascals can't get at them?"

"I've got 'em in a tin box, and put away safe enough."

"I hope you haven't got them hidden around one of the cabins," said Fred. "They'd be sure to find them if they came here some time when you were away, and made a search."

"I haven't got 'em in or near either of the cabins. I've got 'em in a better place than that," was the cunning reply.

"You really ought to have them recorded, Uncle Barney; and then maybe it wouldn't be a bad scheme to put them in a safe deposit box in a bank," said Jack.

"Oh, they're safe enough—don't you fear!" answered the old man. It was plainly to be seen that he was bound to have his own way in everything he did.

Satisfied that the visitors had left the island for the time being, the boys followed the old lumberman into his own cabin, and there helped him to start up the fire. He told them that he had shipped off the wild turkey as desired.

The evening passed quietly, and in the morning the boys found themselves thoroughly rested.

"It's a grand day for hunting!" exclaimed Fred, as he went outside to view the landscape. The sun was just peeping over the trees on the eastern shore of Lake Monona, and soon the dazzling shafts of light were streaming over the ice and snow in all directions.

"Do you think Asa Lemm and those others will be back to-day?" queried Randy.

"There's no telling," answered Jack.

While some of the boys were preparing breakfast, the others walked over to Uncle Barney's cabin. They found the old lumberman already stirring, and invited him to come over and eat his morning meal with them, an invitation which he readily accepted, for he had taken a great liking to all of the Rovers.

"We've been thinking of trying those snowshoes, Uncle Barney," said Jack.

"No time like the present, boys," was the answer. "I'll show you how to put 'em on, and how to use 'em, too."

"Won't you go out hunting with us?" questioned Fred.

"No; I'm going to stay around the cabins, in case those rascals come back. I don't think they will, but there is nothing like being on the safe side."

The hour after the morning meal was productive of a good deal of fun. None of the boys had ever used snowshoes before, and consequently in their efforts to move around on them, they got more than one tumble.

"Great watermelons!" cried Andy, as he pitched headfirst into a snowdrift. "And I

thought using snowshoes was the easiest thing in the world!"

"It's just like plain walking, Andy; it's got to be learned," answered Jack, who, a moment before, had had a tumble himself.

Finally, however, the boys managed to remain on their feet fairly well, and then they started off to do a little hunting along the eastern shore of the island.

"I don't know as you'll be able to stir up very much to-day," announced Uncle Barney. "But even a few rabbits and a few squirrels won't be so bad."

They carried a lunch with them, not knowing whether they would get back to the cabin by noon or not. They were soon gliding over the snow where something of a trail led through the woods.

They tramped a good half mile before they saw anything in the way of game. Then several squirrels appeared, and Fred and Andy had the satisfaction of laying them low with their shotguns. Then they tramped on further, and by noon managed to obtain a rabbit and two woodcocks.

"Not so bad but what it might be worse," announced Jack, who had the rabbit to his credit. "We won't go hungry, that's sure!"

"And don't forget that we've got those wild turkeys to eat," added Andy, who had laid low the two woodcocks.

Being unaccustomed to the use of snowshoes, the lads were glad to rest. They built themselves a little campfire, and, huddling around this, partook of the lunch they had brought along, washing it down with some hot chocolate from a thermos bottle they carried.

The lunch finished, they set off once again, this time going deeper into the woods than ever.

"Listen!" cried Jack presently. "I thought I heard some game stirring."

All came to a halt and listened intently. From a distance they heard a peculiar drumming sound.

"Partridges, I'll bet anything!" cried Randy in a low voice. "Come on, let's see if we can't get some of them."

He led the way over the snow, and the others were not slow in following. They had reached a point where the trees grew sparingly, and where there were a great number of rocks and brushwood.

They could hear a strange fluttering, and then a number of partridges arose in the air some distance in front of them. All took hasty aim and fired, but the game sailed out of sight unharmed.

"That's the time we missed it," observed Jack dismally. "I guess we made too much noise and they heard us."

"Listen!" interrupted Randy. "There is some sort of fight going on ahead."

He was right; and, listening, they made out a strange bark mingled with a snarl and several yelps.

"Let's go ahead and see what it means!" exclaimed Andy, and pushed on, with the others close behind him.

The boys had to skirt some heavy brushwood, and then came out in a small cleared space surrounded by numerous big rocks and pine trees. The strange noises they had heard had come from between two of the large rocks, and now, of a sudden, several forms, snapping and snarling and whirling this way and that in the snow, burst upon their view.

"Wolves!"

"Four of them!"

"They are all fighting over the possession of a dead partridge!"

Four gaunt and hungry-looking wolves had come tumbling out in the snow. One of them was carrying a dead partridge in his mouth, and the other three were doing their best to get the game away from him. As the Rovers came into

the opening, the wolves, for an instant, stopped their fighting and glared at the boys. Then the animal having the game made a sudden leap over the rocks and disappeared from view. The three wolves that remained began to snap and snarl and show their teeth.

"Gracious! they are certainly hungry-looking beggars!" was Randy's comment.

"Come on, let's shoot them!" exclaimed Jack.

"They're no good for game," interposed Randy.

"I know that, Randy. But we don't want them on the island, and neither does Uncle Barney."

"I thought he said there weren't very many wolves left. Maybe——"

Fred, who was speaking, got no further, for at that moment the three hungry-looking wolves crouched low, and then sprang straight in the direction of the four young hunters!

CHAPTER XXVI

JACK FREES HIS MIND

"JUMP for your lives!"

"Shoot them!"

These cries had scarcely been made when Jack's gun rang out and the foremost of the three wolves was hit in the foreleg. He gave a plunge, and rolled over in the snow, snapping and snarling viciously. The report of the weapon was followed by the discharge of Randy's gun, but his aim was wild and the charge passed harmlessly over the heads of the wolves.

"Shoot them!"

"Club them!"

Then another shot rang out as Fred swung into action. It was at close range, and the charge of shot tore directly into the throat of the leading wolf, causing him to leap high into the air, and then fall over on his back. He plunged for a moment, sending the snow flying in every direction, and then lay still.

Shocked evidently by the fate that had over-

THE WOLF RECEIVED A BLOW THAT BOWLED HIM OVER.

taken both of his companions, the third wolf came to a sudden halt. With eyes glaring fiercely, he snapped and then leaped for the nearest rocks.

"Shoot him, somebody! We want to get all three of them!"

Crack! Bang! went a rifle and a shotgun almost simultaneously, but the aim of the two marksmen was poor, and only a few scattering shots went through the tail of the wolf. Then, with a wild yelp, he disappeared behind the rocks, and that was the last seen of him. In the meantime, the wounded beast was snapping and snarling most ferociously. He sent a shower of loose snow toward the Rovers, and then made a desperate leap at Jack.

It was a time of dire peril, and no one realized it more than did the oldest Rover boy. He attempted to retreat, but to do so in snowshoes was too much for him, and over he went on his side in a deep bank of snow, almost disappearing from view.

"The wolf is on top of Jack!"

"Shoot him—but be careful and don't hit Jack!"

"Don't fire!" gasped Randy. "You'll hit Jack sure!" and then, as well as he was able, he sprang to the front, using his gun as a club as he did so. Around came the stock with a wide swing, and

the wolf received a blow in the side that bowled him over and over.

This second attack, coming after he had been wounded in the foreleg, was too much for the animal, and with a yelp of sudden fear he went limping and leaping through the snow, sending the loose particles flying all about him. One of the boys discharged his gun after the beast, but whether he hit the animal or not he could not tell. In another moment the wolf was out of sight.

"Do you think any of them will come back?" panted Andy, who was quite out of breath with excitement.

"I don't think so," answered Jack. "However, let us reload just as quickly as we can and be ready for them." He had been taught the all-important lesson that a hunter should not let his firearm remain empty.

"Well, anyhow, I got one of them!" cried Fred, with proper pride, as he surveyed the beast he had laid low. The discharge of shot had almost torn the wolf's throat asunder.

"What will you do with him?" questioned Randy.

"I'm going to take him back to the cabin and ask Uncle Barney about it," was Fred's reply. "Perhaps we can have the wolf stuffed."

The excitement of the encounter with the wolves had taken away the boys' desire to do any more hunting that day, and, strapping the dead wolf fast to a tree limb, they started on the return to the northern end of the island, each doing his share in carrying the dead animal.

"What's that? A wolf?" cried Barney Stevenson, when he saw what they had brought. And then he added quickly. "Must be the one that we located in the cabin at the other end of the island."

"We can't say about that," answered Jack, and then all of the boys told the story of the encounter in the woods.

"Four of them! Why, I haven't heard of any such thing as that around here for years! I'll have to go after some of those wolves myself."

"I was wondering what we could do with this wolf," said Fred. "Do you think I could send him home to have him stuffed?"

"You could, my boy. But I wouldn't advise it. Who would want a stuffed wolf around anyhow? Of course, you might put him in some club-house or furrier's window—or something like that."

"Oh, I guess I won't bother," answered Fred.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," suggested Jack. "We'll prop the wolf up against a tree, and then take a photograph of Fred shooting at him;" and

so it was decided, and the boys had much fun taking the picture.

Several days passed, and no one came near the island. In the meantime, the boys went out hunting every day, and Barney Stevenson showed them how to fish through a hole in the ice. This was great sport, and they had the satisfaction of adding a number of pickerel and perch to their bill of fare. During those days, they cooked and ate the wild turkeys, and found the meat quite palatable.

"We sure are having one dandy time," said Fred one evening, when sitting in front of the blazing fire.

"I don't see how it could be any better, Fred," answered Andy.

"And just think of what we've brought down in the way of rabbits, squirrels, pheasants, woodcocks and turkeys!"

"Not to say anything about my wolf," came from Fred.

"Yes, and a shot I got at a brook mink," added Jack. He had seen the mink at a distance, but had been unable to bring the game down.

Uncle Barney had been with the boys at supper time, but had taken himself over to his own cabin, to smoke and to read one of several books the boys had given him.

"I think I'll go over and see the old lumberman," said Jack presently. "You fellows can stay here."

"Going to talk to him about Ruth and her folks?" questioned Randy.

"Yes, if I get the chance."

"I wouldn't worry him too much," said Fred. "He hasn't gotten over that visit from Professor Lemm and the others yet."

"Oh, I'll be careful—don't worry about that."

The old lumberman was a bit surprised to have Jack walk in on him, but the youth had brought his gun along, and he asked Uncle Barney to examine the hammer of the weapon.

"It looks all right to me," said the old lumberman, after an examination; "but I'll put on a few drops of oil, and then maybe it'll work easier. It won't do to have the hammer stick just when you want to use it."

"And now, Uncle Barney, if you'll permit me, I'd like to speak of something else," said Jack, as he dropped into a seat alongside of the fireplace. "I've got something on my mind, and I want to see if you can't help me out."

"Something on your mind, eh?" returned the old man kindly. "Well, if I can help you out, you can depend on old Uncle Barney to do it," and he smiled broadly.

"It isn't exactly my trouble, Uncle Barney. It's somebody else's," went on the oldest Rover boy. "A young lady I know is very much worried over something, and she has asked me if I can't do something to help her get rid of that worry."

"Must be some young lady you know pretty well, then, Jack;" and the old lumberman smiled again.

"I do know her quite well. And I think a great deal of her friendship. Her folks have some trouble on hand—quite a good deal of it in fact—and it worries the girl a good deal, and that, of course, worries me. You see, there has been a terrible mistake made, and neither the girl nor her folks know how to get at it to remedy it."

"I see—I see!" The old lumberman nodded his head several times. "That's the way it is often. Things get into a snarl, and a fellow can't see his way clear to straighten 'em out. I've been there myself, and I know."

"This young lady I'm speaking about has an old relative—a sort of uncle—that she thinks a great deal of. Her folks think a great deal of this gentleman, too. Now, years ago, her folks and the old gentleman had a quarrel, and now the old gentleman won't let her come anywhere near him, even though she would love dearly to talk

to him and try to explain matters, so that he would understand that it was not her folks' fault that the quarrel had taken place."

"See here! what are you talking about?" exclaimed Uncle Barney, eyeing Jack suspiciously. "Come now, no beating about the bush!"

"Well, if you must know, I'm speaking about Ruth Stevenson, who goes to a young ladies' school not far from Colby Hall. She and I are very good friends, and she has told me a good deal about this quarrel you had with her father."

"It was Fred Stevenson's fault—it wasn't my fault!" grumbled the old lumberman.

"Maybe it was, Uncle Barney. I don't know anything about that. But I do know that Ruth has told me that her father never wanted nor tried to do you any injury. He claims that it was all a mistake, and that you should have given him a chance to explain."

"It wasn't any mistake—I know just exactly what happened!"

"But don't you think you ought to at least listen to what Ruth's father has to say? All he wants you to do is to hear his story."

"Did he tell you that?"

"Ruth told me. She said both her father and her mother are very much upset over the way you have treated them. They want to be friends

with you, and her father is willing to do whatever is right regarding what took place years ago. She said her folks would like nothing better than to have you give up your lonely life on this island and come down and make your home with them."

"What! Me go down there and live with them after all that has happened! I couldn't do anything like that!" and the old lumberman sprang up and began to pace the cabin floor.

"You could do it if you tried, Uncle Barney. By the way, don't you remember Ruth?"

"Sure I do—as pretty a little girl as ever I set eyes on. I never had anything against her. It was her father I had my quarrel with."

"And you liked Ruth's mother, too, didn't you?" went on Jack slowly.

"Oh, yes. Helen Dean always was a nice girl. I knew her long before Fred Stevenson married her."

"And you liked Ruth's father, too, didn't you, before this quarrel took place?"

"Of course. We were very chummy up to that time." The old lumberman took several turns across the cabin floor. "But that's all over now. He didn't treat me fair—that's all there is to it! He didn't even come to my wife's funeral!"

"Well, if he didn't, he's very sorry for it now.

And you can take it from me, Uncle Barney, that he would like nothing better than to patch up the matter somehow or other, and be friends once more."

"Yes, but——"

"And just think how happy it would make his wife and Ruth!" continued Jack quietly.

"Maybe. But I don't see how it can be done. Anyway, I ain't going to take the first step," went on Uncle Barney, somewhat lamely.

"You won't have to take the first step!" cried Jack. "You just let them do that." He came over and caught the old lumberman by the arm. "Will you?"

For a moment Uncle Barney was silent. He bit his lip and rubbed his chin with the back of his hand.

"Well, I'll see about it," he said slowly. "I'll think it over."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE BLUE TIN BOX

When Jack Rover returned to the other cabin he was in a happy frame of mind. He had talked to Barney Stevenson for over an hour, and the old man had at last agreed to listen to what Ruth's father might have to say to him. He had admitted that living on the island was rather a lonely existence for him, especially as he was getting old.

"I do hope they patch up their differences," remarked Jack to his cousins, after he had told them of the conversation held. "I know it will take a great load off of Ruth's mind."

"Are you going to send the Stevensons a letter?" questioned Fred.

"I'm going to do better than that, Fred," was the reply. "I'll skate down to Rockville the first thing in the morning and send Ruth and her folks a telegram. There is nothing like striking while the iron is hot."

"Exactly so!" put in Andy. "It's just like

catching a flea while he is biting;" and at this sally there was a general laugh.

Jack was as good as his word, and slipped off early in the morning, accompanied by Randy. It was a beautiful day, and the youths had little difficulty in reaching the town. Here the oldest Rover boy spent quite some time concocting the proper message, which he sent to the Stevenson home address.

"I only hope somebody will be there to receive it," he said, after the message had been paid for, and he had urged upon the operator to send it without delay.

Several more days, including Sunday, passed rather quietly for the boys. One afternoon there came another fall of snow, and they grew rather fearful, thinking they might be snowed in. But the fall proved a light one, and in the morning it was as clear as ever.

Jack had been rather disappointed at not getting the brook mink at which he had shot, and now he asked the others if they would not go to the locality where the mink had been seen.

"I'd like to bring one of them down," said the oldest Rover boy.

"Well, we might as well go after the mink as do anything," answered Fred. He was growing just a bit tired of going after nothing but rab-

bits and squirrels. For two days they had seen nothing else at which to shoot. Even the wolves and wild turkeys kept well out of sight.

The boys found old Uncle Barney polishing his gun. He told them, however, that he was not going out hunting, but was going into the woods to inspect some of the trees with a view to cutting them down for lumber.

"You won't have no easy time of it getting a mink," he said. "The only way I ever got 'em was in a trap. Howsomever, go ahead and enjoy yourselves. Hunting is a good deal like fishing —you can have lots of fun even if you don't get anything," and he chuckled. Nevertheless, his face looked as if he was somewhat worried.

"I'll wager he's thinking about Ruth's father and that meeting they may have," said Randy, when the Rovers were alone and preparing to go out on the hunt.

"Either that, Randy, or else he is brooding over the trouble Professor Lemm and Mr. Brown are making for him."

"There's one thing I can't understand about this," put in Andy. "Why should those men be so anxious to obtain possession of an island like this? It isn't very large, and the lumber on it can't be worth a great deal. I should think they could pick up a piece of real estate almost any-

where that would be far more valuable than this."

"Now you're saying something that I've been thinking right along," answered Jack. "Even if they wanted this place for a summer resort, it wouldn't bring any great sum of money."

"One thing is certain," said Fred; "they are very eager to get possession."

"Yes. And another thing is certain, too," added Jack. "That is, Uncle Barney isn't going to let them have it if he can possibly stop them."

The boys had had an early breakfast, and now they filled one of their game bags with a well-cooked lunch, and also carried with them a thermos bottle filled with hot chocolate.

"We don't want to run short on food," cautioned Andy. "Gee! what an appetite this fresh air gives a fellow!"

"Right you are!" answered Fred. "I could eat five or six meals a day and never mind it at all."

"I'm glad we have managed to bring down so many squirrels and rabbits," put in Randy. "If it wasn't for that, we might have run a little short on eating. I'm a little bit tired of squirrel stew and rabbit potpie, although they are a whole lot better than going hungry."

Barney Stevenson came out to see them off.

"Going down to that brook where you saw the

mink?" he questioned, referring to a tiny water-course, now, of course, frozen up, located near the southern end of the island.

"Yes. And maybe we'll get away down to the other cabin," answered Jack. "We thought we'd like to take a look around there."

"And if we don't come back to-night, you'll know that we're staying at that cabin," said Fred.

"Oh, we didn't calculate to stay out all night," put in Jack quickly.

"I know we didn't. But it's just possible it may get too late for us to come back, and that cabin would be comfortable enough, especially if we managed to drag in some pine boughs for beds."

"Well, don't shoot more than half a dozen minks—or half a dozen deer, either!" shouted Uncle Barney after them; and then they started off and were soon out of sight, skating along the eastern shore of Snowshoe Island.

Left to himself, Uncle Barney began to pace the floor of his cabin impatiently. Evidently the old lumberman was turning over something in his mind—something which bothered him a great deal.

"Of course they are safe!" he murmured to himself. "It couldn't be otherwise. The last

time I looked, the tin box was just where I had left it. I don't see why I should get so nervous over it."

Presently he drew out his pipe, filled it, and sat down in front of the fire to smoke. As he did this, a slight noise outside the cabin attracted his attention.

"I wonder what that was?" he asked himself, and, arising, looked out of one of the cabin windows. Then he went to the door and gazed around. No one was in sight, and he closed the door again.

"Must have been the wind, or something like that," he murmured. "Or else I'm getting more nervous than I ever was before. Now that I've got used to those boys around, it seems dreadfully lonely when they are gone;" and he heaved a deep sigh.

He remained in front of the fire for the best part of half an hour. Then, as if struck by a sudden determination, he leaped up, knocked the ashes from his pipe, and began to put on his snowshoes. He donned his heavy coat and his cap, locked up his cabin, and strode off in the direction of the heavy woods in the center of the island.

Although Barney Stevenson was not aware of it, the noise he had heard while seated before the

open fire had betokened something of importance. Entirely unknown to the old lumberman or to the Rover boys, Slugger Brown and Nappy Martell had arrived in the vicinity of the two cabins on the northern point of the island. Both of the youths were armed, but they approached the cabin occupied by the old lumberman with the greatest of secrecy.

"It looks like another wild-goose chase to me," growled Slugger Brown, when they were close to the place. "We've been here three times now, and the old man hasn't done a thing out of the ordinary."

"Well, we're sure of one thing, anyway," Nappy replied. "He hasn't got those deeds anywhere around that cabin—or at least no place where we could locate them."

The bully and his crony had, from a distance, watched the departure of the Rovers. As can be guessed from their conversation, they had visited the island several times before, each time taking care that none of the others should discover their presence. On their trips they had been strongly tempted to "rough-house" the cabin occupied by Jack and his cousins, but they had not dared to do this, fearing it might cause the Rovers to go on guard.

"And anyhow, we're not here for that pur-

pose now," Slugger Brown had observed. "We want to get those land deeds for my dad and old Lemon."

The two youths had come close to the side of the cabin and peered in at one of the windows, and it was this noise that had attracted Barney Stevenson's attention. But they had managed to keep out of sight of the old lumberman by flinging themselves down behind some bushes. They watched the departure of Uncle Barney with interest, and at once resolved to follow him.

"Of course we haven't any snowshoes; so maybe we won't get very far," said Slugger, "but we will do the best we can."

Unconscious that his movements were being so closely observed, Uncle Barney plunged deep into the woods, taking a trail which was familiar to him. In some spots the snow lay deep, but in the majority of places the wind had swept the ground almost bare, so Slugger and Nappy had no great difficulty in following in the old man's footsteps.

"He doesn't seem to be going out after any game," observed Nappy presently. "I just saw a rabbit running ahead of him, and he never even raised his gun."

"I think I know where he's going," answered Slugger. "We'll soon find out if I'm right."

"You mean that cave your father once spoke about?"

"That's it, Nappy."

"What is there about that cave that makes it so important?" went on the other curiously.

"Never mind that now—you'll know some day—when my father gets possession of the island," answered Slugger rather importantly.

The best part of half a mile more was covered, and then Barney Stevenson left the trail and plunged in among a wilderness of trees and rocks. He had to take off his snowshoes, and he hung them up in a tree. Then he went ahead once more, presently reaching the foot of a little cliff. Here there was an opening six or seven feet in diameter, and he disappeared into this.

"What do you know about that?" cried Nappy in a low voice. "Is that a cave?"

"That's just what it is!" answered Slugger triumphantly. "I only hope it's the cave my father wanted to locate."

"Why does he want to locate a cave on this island?" asked Nappy, more curious than ever.

"You'll know some day, Nap. Now come on—let's try to find out what the old man is going to do in that cave."

With caution, the bully and his crony made their way over the snow, and then slipped in-

side the entrance to the cave. Ahead of them they saw the flicker of a lantern which Uncle Barney had lit.

The cave was irregular in shape, running back a distance of a hundred feet or more. As the old man advanced he held his gun ready for use, thinking that possibly some wild animal had taken possession; but no animal of any sort appeared.

Coming to the back end of the cave, the old man set down the lantern on a rock. Then he got down on his knees and began to pull away at a large flat stone, close by. He worked rather feverishly, as if growing more nervous every instance.

"It must be here! They couldn't have gotten it away from me!" he muttered to himself.

As he worked, Slugger and Nappy approached until they were within plain sight of what he was doing. They did not make a sound, however, and Uncle Barney never suspected their presence.

When the flat stone had been set aside, there was revealed a small *cache,* lined with more stones. At the bottom of this *cache* rested a fair-sized tin box, dark blue in color, and secured with a padlock.

"Ha! I knew it was safe!" cried the old man in a relieved tone of voice. "I knew they couldn't find it!"

"Say! what do you suppose——" began Nappy, when Slugger clapped a hand over his mouth.

The low-spoken words echoed throughout the cavern, and, much startled, Uncle Barney dropped the tin box and sprang to his feet. As he did this Slugger Brown shoved his crony behind a projecting rock, and crouched low himself.

"Who is there?" cried the old lumberman, and caught up his gun. "Who is there, I say! Speak, or I'll fire!"

For reply, Slugger picked up a good-sized stone which was handy. Taking hasty aim, he hurled it at the old man. It struck Uncle Barney in the forehead, and slowly the old lumberman sank to the floor of the cave unconscious.

CHAPTER XXVIII

UNCLE BARNEY'S SECRET

"Looks to me as if we were going to be stumped, Jack."

"I agree, Andy. It doesn't look as if there were any mink in this neighborhood," answered the oldest Rover boy.

"Don't give up yet," pleaded Fred, who sat on a fallen tree, resting.

"It's barely noon yet," announced Andy, glancing at his watch. "We've half a day before us."

The boys had spent the entire time since leaving their cabin in skating along the shore of the island and making their way along the tiny, frozen-up watercourse, where they had hoped to discover at least one brook mink. But the only game to come into sight had been a squirrel, and they had not shot at this, fearing to disturb the other game, were it in that vicinity.

"Let's have lunch before we continue hunting," suggested Andy. "This is as good a spot as any to rest in."

The others were willing, and, finding a little cleared space, they built a tiny campfire and proceeded to make themselves at home. They passed a full hour over the mid-day meal, for the constant skating and tramping through the woods and climbing over the rocks was very tiring.

"It won't be long before our vacation will be at an end," observed Fred. "Only a few days more, and we'll have to get into the grind again at Colby Hall."

"Don't dare to mention lessons yet, Fred!" cried Andy. "Time enough for that when the school bell rings."

"I was hoping Mr. Stevenson would get up here before we left," said Jack. "I want to see how he and old Uncle Barney get along."

"Maybe he's staying away on purpose, so that he'll have a chance to see the old man alone," suggested Randy.

The middle of the afternoon found the four young hunters near the end of the frozen-up watercourse, at a point where it ran in summer over some rough rocks into the lake below. Here the ground was very irregular, and once Fred slipped into a hollow, giving his left ankle a bad twist.

"Ouch!" he cried, and made a wry face.

"Much hurt?" asked the others quickly.

"I—I don't think so," answered the youngest Rover slowly. He pulled himself up and took a step or two. "I guess it is all right; but it was a nasty tumble, just the same."

"We've got to be careful. It won't do for any of us to sprain an ankle or break a leg," cautioned Jack.

They had gone only a short distance further when Randy suddenly put up his hand.

"I saw something flit through the snow near yonder rocks," he whispered, pointing.

"I see it!" ejaculated Jack, and with these words he took hasty aim, and fired. Then his cousins saw another movement in the snow, between some nearby rocks, and they, too, discharged their weapons.

There was a commotion both in the direction in which Jack had fired, and also down between the nearer rocks, and, rushing up, the four young hunters beheld two minks, whirling about in the snow, each badly wounded.

"Mink, boys! Think of it!"

"Don't let them get away!"

These cries mingled with several more rapid reports, as one lad after another fired a second charge. This time their aims were better, and in a moment each of the minks lay stretched out on the rocks, dead.

"I think there was a third one," observed Randy, "but he must have got away."

"Well, we've got two, anyway," answered Jack with some pride. "What beautiful creatures they are!"

Each of the minks was over a foot in length, not counting the bushy tail. They were of a soft brown shade, with a ridge of black on the back and patches of white below. Each was quite plump, and gave forth a peculiar strong odor.

The boys were greatly delighted, and viewed the game with much satisfaction. They placed the minks over their shoulders, and then continued the hunt, presently stirring up half a dozen rabbits.

"I guess we had better be starting for the cabin," announced Jack presently.

"How about going to that other cabin at the south end of the island?" queried Fred.

"Oh, let's give that up!" cried Randy. "I feel like getting back to where we have all our things."

The others were inclined to do this, and, somewhat against his will, Fred agreed to return to the north end of Snowshoe Island. Not without some difficulty, they made their way back to the lake shore, and there put on their skates once again and started.

The young hunters had expected to see Uncle

Barney awaiting them on their return, and they were a bit surprised when the old lumberman did not show himself.

"He must be putting in a full day sizing up that lumber he spoke about," observed Jack, as he gazed at his watch. "It's nearly six o'clock."

"He can't see much in this darkness," observed Randy.

The boys entered their cabin, and after resting a bit proceeded to cook supper. They expected every moment to hear a shout from Uncle Barney, but none came, and at last they sat down to the meal alone.

"I don't like this much," was Jack's comment, when another hour had passed, and the old lumberman had failed to show himself. "If he was going to stay away like this he should have left some word."

"Let's take a look around his cabin," suggested Fred.

This was done, but it shed no light on the unusual occurrence. The boys sat down and tried to amuse themselves as best they could, but, as another hour went by, their anxiety increased.

"Something is wrong, I feel certain," announced Jack at last.

"Maybe while he was out in the woods he fell down over some rocks," suggested Andy.

"He's a pretty old man to be climbing around in dangerous places," added his twin.

When the time came to go to bed, none of the boys felt like retiring. A lantern was lit and hung up on a flagpole which stood between the two cabins. This was a signal which had been agreed upon when the Rovers had first come to Snowshoe Island.

"There! Now if he can see the light he'll be able to locate himself," said Fred.

The boys took a walk around by the boat landing, and also to the edge of the woods back of the cabin, but all to no purpose. Then they finally retired to their own shelter.

"We might as well go to bed," suggested Randy. "It won't do any good for all of us to stay up. If you say so, we might take turns in staying on guard, in case we should hear a call for help, or anything like that."

This was considered good advice, and each youth took two hours at staying awake while the others slept; and thus the night passed.

With the first streak of daylight, the boys prepared a hasty breakfast, and then went outside to view the situation. They soon found the tracks of the old lumberman's snowshoes, leading into the woods, and presently saw two other tracks close behind them.

"I'm no sleuth, but it looks to me as if Uncle Barney went into the woods and two persons followed him!" exclaimed Jack.

"Just the way it looks to me, too," answered Fred.

"Let's go and follow up those footprints at once," suggested Andy.

The others were willing, and in a short space of time they were on their snowshoes and making their way through the woods in the center of the island.

"Hello! here's something!" cried Jack presently, and pointed to the old lumberman's snowshoes, where they still rested among the branches of a tree.

Then the boys saw where he had climbed between the rocks, and, taking off their snowshoes, they followed the footprints.

"A cave!"

"What do you know about that!"

It did not take the lads long to reach the entrance of the cavern. Then Jack, who had brought along one of the flashlights, turned it on and entered, followed by his cousins.

"Hello, Uncle Barney!" he cried out at the top of his lungs. "Uncle Barney! are you here?"

"Help! help!" came feebly from the inner end of the cave, and, guided by the flashlight, the four

Rovers ran in that direction. They found the old man sitting on a rock with his head resting on his arm.

"Are you hurt? How did it happen?" questioned Jack quickly.

"They've robbed me!" moaned the old lumberman. "They came up behind me, and somebody hit me in the head with a rock! Then they ran away with my tin box!"

"Who was it? Are you badly hurt?" questioned Randy.

"I guess I'm not so awfully bad off, even though my head did bleed some," answered Uncle Barney. "But the worst of it is, they got away with my tin box—the one that's got the deeds to this island in it, and all my other valuables, including my dead wife's jewelry and a thousand dollars in gold."

By this time the boys were examining the old man's head. They saw where the rock had struck him, making quite a cut, from which the blood had flowed over one ear. It was much swollen, and over it Uncle Barney had tied a bandanna handkerchief.

"I'll get some snow and wash it off with that!" cried Fred, and did so. Then the wound was bound up once more, and Uncle Barney said he felt better. He told his story in detail.

"What am I going to do?" he groaned. "Those rascals have got my treasure box!"

"Who were they?" questioned Randy.

"I don't know exactly. I heard them talk, and faced them with my gun. They were in the dark, so I couldn't distinguish them very good. Then one of them threw a big rock, and that is all I can remember. As soon as I became unconscious they must have grabbed the box and run away with it."

"It must have been either Asa Lemm and Mr. Brown, or else Slugger and Nappy," said Randy.

"I don't know what I'm going to do, now those deeds are gone—not to say anything about my wife's jewelry and all that gold!" groaned the old lumberman.

"Just you take it easy, Uncle Barney. You mustn't excite yourself now," said Jack kindly. "We'll do what we can toward getting the box back."

The boys had brought some food along, and they insisted upon it that the old man eat and drink something. This seemed to strengthen Uncle Barney greatly, and he arose to his feet.

"Now we'll get after those rascals," he said, with something of the old-time fire in his eyes. "I'm not going to allow 'em to rob me in this fashion!"

While the old lumberman had been eating, the Rover boys had glanced around the cave curiously. It was a place partly natural and partly artificial. On one side it looked as if a little mining had been done, and Jack, who had studied geology, gazed at the surface of rocks and dirt with much interest.

"Why, Uncle Barney, this looks to me as if it was zinc ore!" he cried presently.

"Hush, hush, boy! I don't want anybody to know about that!" answered the old man quickly.

"Then it is zinc ore, is it?" queried Randy, who had also been inspecting a side of the cave.

"Yes, if you must know," was the surprising reply. "Right here, in the middle of this island, is one of the most valuable zinc ore beds to be found anywhere."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE DISCOVERY

"THE trouble is, those rascals have a twenty-four hours' start of us," remarked Jack. "For all we know they may be miles away by this time."

"It's too bad Uncle Barney didn't take our advice and either have those deeds recorded, or else place them in some bank vault," said Fred.

"The thing now is to see if we can trail those fellows, whoever they were," put in Randy.

"That's the talk!" cried his twin. "No use of crying over spilt milk, as the cat said when she tipped the pan over into the well," and at this remark there was a faint smile.

The Rovers had drawn to one side to talk over the situation while Barney Stevenson was preparing to accompany them from the cave. The old man was both excited and worried. He cared little about the wound he had received on the head. All he wanted to do was to get back his treasure box, as he called it.

The little party soon reached the point where

all had left their snowshoes. They looked around with care, and presently made out a trail leading toward the lake shore.

"If they went down to the lake, they most likely skated away," remarked Fred.

It was an easy matter to follow the trail through the snow. It led up to the vicinity of some rough rocks, and here turned southward.

"I guess they reasoned that they couldn't get over those rocks," remarked Uncle Barney. "Maybe they were afraid of a bad tumble. I wish they had gone over them and broken their necks!" he added bitterly.

"If only they had dropped the treasure box in the snow!" murmured Fred.

"No such luck for us, Fred," responded Jack. "I'm afraid that box and its precious contents are far away by this time."

They continued to follow the footprints, and at the end of a quarter of an hour found themselves at something of a clearing between the trees. Here those who had stolen the box had evidently stopped to rest, for it could be seen where they had been seated on a fallen log, and where they had placed the box.

"Look here!" cried Jack, who was inspecting the ground closely. "Just as I thought—those fellows were Slugger and Nappy, I feel certain."

He pointed to several half-burnt matches, and also a number of cigarette stubs.

"I guess you're right," returned Randy. "I'm quite sure Asa Lemm doesn't smoke cigarettes, and when he was on the island Mr. Brown was smoking a black-looking cigar."

"Well, if those boys stole the box, they will most likely turn it over to the professor and Brown," said Uncle Barney. "Oh, if only I could get my hands on them!" and his eyes flashed.

The trail now led through a patch of woods and went into something of a semicircle. Then there was a little loop, which caused the boys some perplexity, but did not bother the old lumberman.

"They lost their way—that's all," explained Uncle Barney. "But, after moving around in a loop, they headed in this direction," and he pointed with his hand. "Come on! Maybe they got hopelessly lost further on and are still in the woods. I hope so."

The trail led deeper and deeper into the woods and wound in and out among a number of rocks. It was plainly evident that Slugger and Nappy had lost their way, and had made a number of false turns.

"Here is where they rested again," announced Jack presently, and showed where some rocks had been swept clear of the snow.

"Yes, and they stopped long enough to have something to eat," added Randy. "Here are a crust of bread and some cake crumbs."

The trail continued to wind in and out among the woods, and the Rovers and the old lumberman followed it for fully an hour longer. Then they came out on the eastern shore of the island.

"I guess this is the end of it," announced Uncle Barney dismally. "They probably skated away from this point."

"No, they didn't!" cried Jack, who was making an examination of the footprints. "They went down the lake shore."

"I'll tell you what I think!" said Randy. "They most likely wanted to get to Rockville, and they were afraid that if they attempted to cross to the other side of the island they would become lost again. So instead of going across, they went down to the lower end."

"Here come two men!" cried Randy suddenly. He had been peering out on the surface of the lake.

"Maybe they are Professor Lemm and Mr. Brown," suggested Andy.

The men were at a great distance, but skating rapidly toward the island. As they came closer, Jack saw that they were strangers, and he waved his cap and shouted at them.

"They may have seen Slugger and Nappy, or else they may have some news for us," he said.

As the two strangers came closer, Uncle Barney looked at them curiously. Then he drew himself up and his face stiffened.

"Don't you know those two men?" he questioned rather sharply, turning to the boys.

"No," answered Jack, and the others shook their heads.

"The man ahead is Fred Stevenson, and the other is Mr. Powell."

"Oh, is that so!" exclaimed Jack; and then without further ado he ran out on the ice to meet the newcomers.

"So this is Jack Rover, eh?" said Mr. Stevenson, shaking hands warmly. "I'm glad to know you; and I must thank you for sending me that telegram."

"I sincerely hope you can patch up your differences with old Uncle Barney," answered Jack quietly. "He's in a peck of trouble just now."

"Why, what has happened?" questioned Ruth's father. "But excuse me," he added. "This is my friend, Mr. Powell."

By this time the other Rovers had come forward, and all told the two men of what had taken place. In the meantime, Uncle Barney re-

mained behind on the lake shore, resting on his gun and eyeing the visitors speculatively.

"I wish you would all do me a favor," said Mr. Stevenson, in a low tone of voice, so that the old lumberman might not hear. "I wish you would give me a chance to speak to Uncle Barney alone."

"Certainly we'll give you that chance, Mr. Stevenson," answered Jack readily. "We are after the two rascals who stole that treasure box. Tell Uncle Barney that we are going to continue the hunt while you are doing your talking. Maybe Mr. Powell would like to go with us."

"Certainly. I don't want to interfere with this affair between these other men," was the quick reply.

Leaving Ruth's father to talk matters over with the old lumberman, the Rover boys and Mr. Powell began the journey down the side of Snowshoe Island. As they proceeded, the boys told the man many of the particulars of how Professor Lemm and Mr. Brown, accompanied by Slugger and Nappy, had come to the island to take possession, and then how the old lumberman had been attacked in the cave and how the precious blue tin box had been stolen.

"That's certainly carrying matters with a high hand," was Mr. Powell's comment. "I sincerely

trust the old man gets the box back. If he doesn't, it may cause him a great deal of trouble, especially if those deeds have not been recorded since the old courthouse burnt down. I remember well that that fire caused a great deal of trouble among property owners in this county."

He told the boys that he and his wife and daughter May had been visiting the Stevensons at the time the Rovers' telegram arrived. He had left his wife and daughter to continue the visit, and had accompanied Mr. Stevenson on the trip just for the sake of a little outing.

"This quarrel between old Uncle Barney, as he is called, and the Stevensons is all nonsense," he declared flatly. "It could have been cleared up years ago if the old man would only have listened to reason. But he was much upset by his financial losses, and more upset when his wife died, and he wouldn't listen to a word. Now that he is willing to talk I am sure they can patch it up."

About a mile was covered, and then the Rovers and Mr. Powell found where Slugger and Nappy had gone ashore again at a point where the island was quite low.

"I'll wager they thought they could cross here with ease, and thus save themselves the trouble of going around the south point," said Jack, and in this surmise he was correct.

Once again the trail led into the woods, and now it was fairly straight up to a point where the ground became rougher. Here they found the snow scattered around some rocks, and rightly guessed that one of the youths had had a tumble.

"And I guess the tumble must have hurt some," announced Randy. "Look at those footprints further on, will you? One of the fellows did a lot of limping."

"Maybe he twisted his ankle, or something like that!" cried Andy.

"It's too bad he didn't hurt himself so severely that he couldn't go any further," grumbled Fred.

"It won't be long now before we come out near that cabin where we stayed during that awful snowstorm," said Jack.

It was now well along in tht middle of the afternoon, and the Rovers rightly concluded that this point had not been reached by Slugger and Nappy until late the day before.

"If one of them was hurt, they wouldn't want to skate away over to Rockville in the dark," said Randy. "Maybe they stayed on this island all night."

"There is that old cabin!" exclaimed Fred, as they reached a cleared space and could see some distance ahead.

The little cabin was thickly surrounded by

snow, and looked very much as it had when they had left it. But to their surprise, not to say delight, they saw a thin wreath of smoke curling up out of the chimney.

"Somebody is there as sure as fate!" exclaimed Jack.

"Come on, let's see who it is!" burst out Randy.

All hurried forward, making no noise in the snow, and soon reached the side of the cabin. Then Jack, who was in advance, peered in through a corner of the broken-out window, pulling aside the nailed-up blanket for that purpose.

The sight which met his gaze filled him with surprise and satisfaction. On a rude couch at one side of the single room of which the structure boasted, rested Slugger Brown, his ankle tied up in a rude bandage. In front of the fire sat Nappy Martell with the old lumberman's treasure box on his lap. Nappy had a knife in one hand, and, with the file blade, was trying to file apart the padlock to the box.

CHAPTER XXX

SETTLING ACCOUNTS—CONCLUSION

"How are you making out?" those outside the cabin heard Slugger Brown ask.

"It's slow work with such a small file," grumbled Nappy Martell. "If I had a big file I could get the padlock off in no time."

"What's the matter with smashing it off with a rock?" growled the bully. He arose to his feet and hobbled to where his crony sat. "Give it to me—I'll soon have it off!"

"Come on," whispered Jack to his cousins and Mr. Powell. "They are in there and trying to open the treasure box!"

It took the party but a few seconds to reach the door of the cabin. Jack pushed upon it, to find the barrier locked in some manner from the inside.

"Hello! who's there?" shouted Slugger.

"Maybe it's your father and Professor Lemm come back," added Nappy.

The bully came to the door and threw it open.

When he found himself confronted by the Rovers and a strange man, he fell back in consternation.

"You!" he gasped. "How—er—did you get here?"

"You let us alone!" cried Nappy, in alarm; and, leaping to his feet, he tried to hide the precious box behind him.

"So we've got you, have we?" exclaimed Jack. "Nappy, you hand over that box."

"I—I don't know what you mean," stammered the lad addressed.

"See here! you haven't any right to come in here in this fashion," blustered Slugger, recovering somewhat from his surprise.

"Haven't we though!" broke out Randy.

"We've caught you, and we intend to make you suffer for what you've done," said Andy.

As lame as he was, Slugger attempted to edge his way toward the door, thinking he might get a chance to run away. But Jack caught him by the arm and sent him flying backward into a corner of the cabin.

"You'll stay right where you are, Slugger Brown!" declared the oldest Rover boy. "Don't you dare to run away!"

By this time Randy and Fred had approached Nappy, and suddenly the youngest Rover darted

behind the youth and snatched the blue tin box from his grasp.

"Hi! you give me that box!" stormed Nappy. "You've no right to take it from me!" and then he, too, tried to run from the cabin. He got as far as the doorway when Andy put out his foot and sent him headlong into the snow outside. Then Andy quickly sat down on him, and, rushing up, Randy did the same.

"Don—don't smash me!" spluttered Nappy, whose face was partly in the snow.

"We're not going to let you get away," came firmly from Andy.

"Let's tie his hands behind him and make him a prisoner," suggested his twin, and this the two boys proceeded to do, using some skate straps for that purpose.

In the meanwhile, Slugger attempted to draw a pistol, but was promptly hurled back by Jack and Fred. Then Mr. Powell disarmed the youth, and he, too, was made a prisoner.

"You'll catch it for treating us this way!" growled Slugger, when he realized that he could do no more. "Just wait until my father hears of this!"

"And just you wait, Slugger, until Mr. Stevenson gets here," retorted Jack, and this answer made the bully turn pale.

Now that the two rascals had been captured, the Rover boys felt very much elated, the more so since they had recovered Uncle Barney's treasure box without the contents having been disturbed.

"Won't he be glad!" murmured Fred, as he looked the box over.

"Let's go out and see if we can't signal to him in some way," returned Randy.

He went outside and three shots were fired in rapid succession, a signal which had been agreed upon when the boys had first gone out hunting. After the signal had been given, Mr. Powell said he would go out and watch for the coming of the Stevensons. While he was doing this, the Rovers talked matters over with Slugger and Nappy.

"You're a fine pair to act in this fashion," said Jack sternly. "Don't you know you might have killed Barney Stevenson?"

"Oh, we didn't hurt him much," grumbled Slugger.

"And it was stealing to run off with this box!" said Randy.

"No, it wasn't! That box has got deeds in it that ought to go to my father!"

"I don't believe it, Slugger. Those deeds belong to Barney Stevenson."

A minute or two later all those in the cabin heard Mr. Powell give a shout.

"A couple of men are coming!" he cried.

"It's my dad and Professor Lemm!" broke out Slugger. "Now you fellows will catch it!"

"Be on your guard, everybody!" sang out Jack to his cousins, and each of them caught up his gun and waited.

A few minutes later, Professor Lemm and Mr. Brown appeared in front of the cabin. Their arms were full of camp supplies. Evidently, this place had been a rendezvous for the entire Brown party for several days. It was from here that Slugger and Nappy had gone up to the other end of the island to spy upon Uncle Barney.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded Mr. Brown, when he found himself confronted by the Rovers.

"It means that we have made your son and Nappy Martell prisoners," explained Jack calmly.

"Prisoners!"

"Yes. And I think more than likely we'll have to hand them over to the authorities."

"I don't understand this at all," put in Asa Lemm, and his voice trembled a little.

Mr. Powell had now come up, and the Rovers told him who the men were. He at once took charge of matters.

"This is a serious business, Mr. Brown," he said sternly. "Your son and this other young man attacked old Barney Stevenson in a most outrageous manner and robbed him of a box of valuables. What Mr. Stevenson will do in the matter I don't know. I expect him here very shortly."

At once there was a wordy quarrel, Mr. Brown showing his temper in anything but a dignified manner. He wanted his son and Nappy released, and threatened all sorts of things, but all to no purpose. Mr. Powell was obdurate, and the Rovers kept themselves in readiness to use their firearms should the occasion require. Asa Lemm had little to say.

The discussion was growing exceedingly warm when there came another interruption, and Uncle Barney, followed by Frederic Stevenson, burst into the cabin. The old lumberman gazed at the assembled crowd, and then at the Rovers.

"My box? Did you find my box?" he questioned quickly.

"Yes, Uncle Barney, we've got the box safe and sound," answered Jack, and handed it over.

"Did those young rascals have it?" and Uncle Barney pointed to Slugger and Nappy.

"Yes. And that fellow was trying to file away the padlock when we got here."

"You whelps, you!" cried the old lumberman, his eyes blazing. And as he strode toward Slugger and Nappy they shrank back as far as the corner of the cabin permitted.

"Don't you hit me—don't you dare!" howled the bully.

"I—I didn't mean anything by it!" whined Nappy. He was now thoroughly cowed.

Another war of words followed, and the discussion grew even hotter than before. Again Mr. Brown threatened all sorts of things, but Uncle Barney simply laughed at him. Then Frederic Stevenson took a hand.

"Uncle Barney," he said, catching the old man by the shoulder, "you let me manage this for you, will you?"

"All right, Fred. You do as you please—only they can't have Snowshoe Island," was the old man's answer. Evidently the long standing differences between the pair had been patched up at last.

"What I've got to say, I can say in very few words," came from Ruth's father, as he confronted Mr. Brown and Professor Lemm. "You have tried to carry matters here with a high hand, and the result has been that you have laid yourselves liable to a suit at law, while those two young rascals are liable to go to prison."

"Oh, Dad! don't let them have us arrested!" pleaded Slugger.

"I don't want to bother with the law—I want to be left alone," said Uncle Barney in a low voice.

"This island belongs to my relative here—Mr. Barnard Stevenson," proceeded Ruth's father. "He has a free and clear title to it, as I well know. I understand something of your underhanded work, Brown. And I understand, too, how you and Professor Lemm found out that this island contained some very valuable zinc ore beds. But your scheme to gain possession of this place has fallen through."

"Don't be so sure of that!" snarled Slugger's father.

"I am sure of it. Unless you leave my relative here alone, you are going to get yourself into pretty hot water. And not only that—if you bother him again, I'll see to it that your son and that other young man are sent to prison for what they have done."

"Say! will you let us go if my dad gives up his claim to the island?" broke in Slugger eagerly.

"If your father and Professor Lemm will promise never to bother Barnard Stevenson in the future, I think he'll be willing to let this case against you drop."

"All right then. Dad, let's do that. We don't want the old island, anyhow!"

"You can't do anything without those deeds," added Nappy.

"Shut up! You boys make me sick!" grunted Mr. Brown.

"But Martell is right—we can't do anything without the deeds," whispered Professor Lemm. He was growing more fearful every moment over the outcome of what had taken place.

More words followed, but in the end Mr. Brown and Professor Lemm promised to let their so-called claim on Snowshoe Island drop. Then Slugger and Nappy were released, and all were told to take their departure as soon as possible.

"You think you're smart, don't you?" grumbled Slugger to Jack, when he was ready to go. "You just wait, Jack Rover! I'm not going to forget you and your cousins in a hurry!"

"And I won't forget you, either!" added Nappy Martell.

What these two unworthies did in the future to worry the Rovers will be told in another volume, to be entitled, "The Rover Boys Under Canvas; Or, The Mystery of the Wrecked Submarine." In that volume we shall meet many of our old friends again, and learn the particulars of some out-of-the-ordinary happenings.

"Well, I'm mighty glad they're gone," said Fred, after the visitors had disappeared in the distance.

"Glad doesn't express it!" added Andy. "I could fairly dance a jig for joy!"

"And to think we saved the treasure box!" broke in Jack.

"That's the best of all," came from Randy.

Old Uncle Barney was exceedingly happy, not only to have the box restored to him, but also because the trouble between himself and his relatives had been completely cleared away.

"I guess I was something of an old fool to quarrel with Fred and his family," he remarked to Jack later on, when talking the matter over. "It shows that a man should not be too hasty and headstrong. If I had only listened in the first place, all this would never have happened."

"I'm glad you're friends once more," said Jack.

"I owe you boys a great deal for this, just as I owe you a great deal for saving the treasure box and saving my life in the woods that time," answered the old lumberman with feeling.

The next day was spent by Uncle Barney and Mr. Stevenson in going over the matter of the deeds. Ruth's father insisted upon it that they be duly recorded and then placed away in a bank

vault. It may be added here that later on this was done, and, later still, the zinc ore beds on the island were opened up and found to be fully as valuable as anticipated. Old Uncle Barney became quite a rich man, and took up his home with the other Stevensons.

While the Stevensons were consulting about the deeds, the Rover boys went out on another hunt, this time accompanied by Mr. Powell, who was quite a sportsman. They had considerable luck, bringing in over a dozen rabbits, four squirrels and several partridges.

"And now we've got to get ready to go home," said Jack, a day or two later.

"Yes. And get ready for the grind at Colby Hall," added Fred.

"But we've had some dandy times on this island!" declared Andy.

"Couldn't have been better!" came in a chorus.

And here we will say good-bye to the Rover boys.

THE END

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